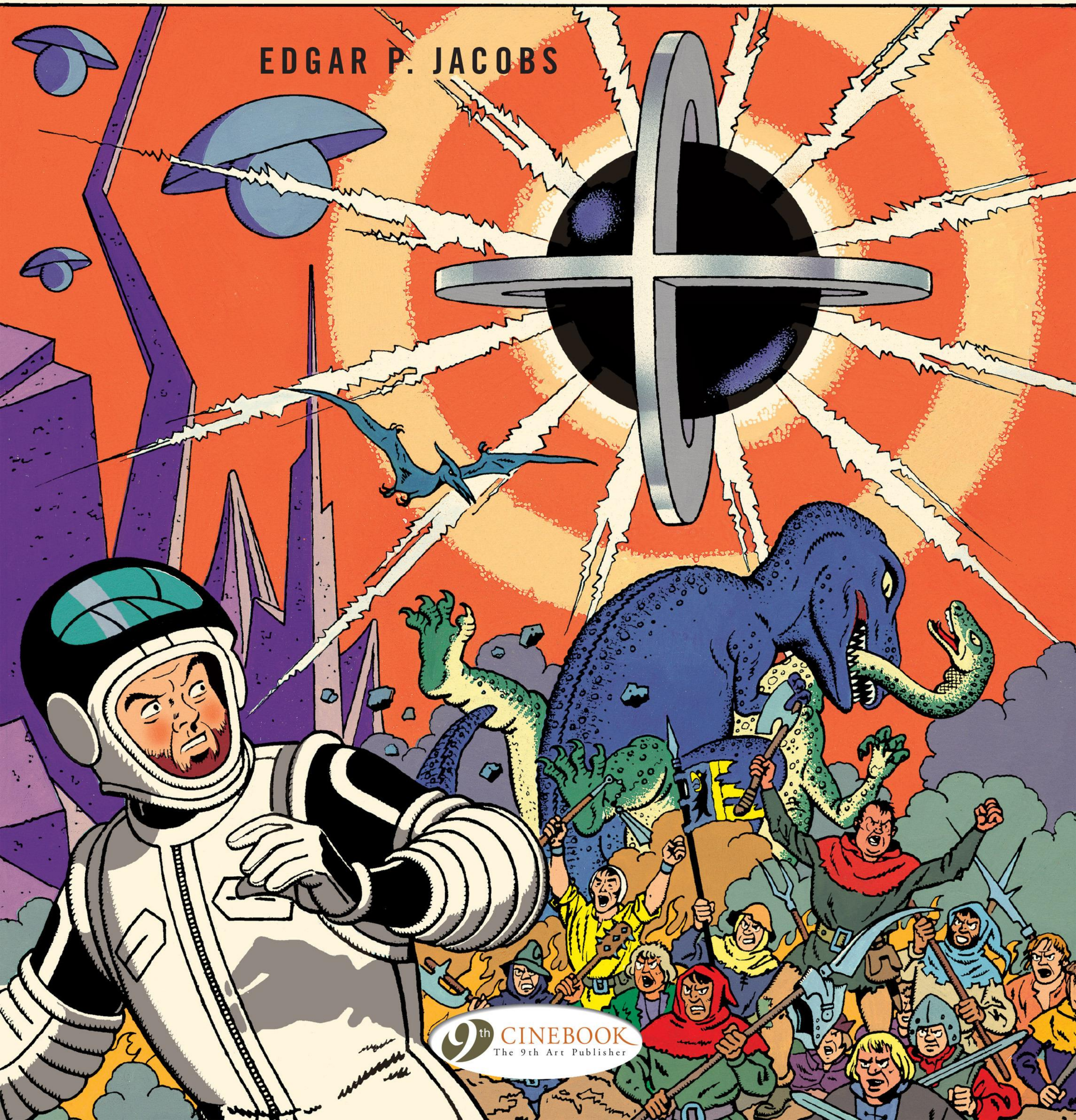




THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

THE TIME TRAP

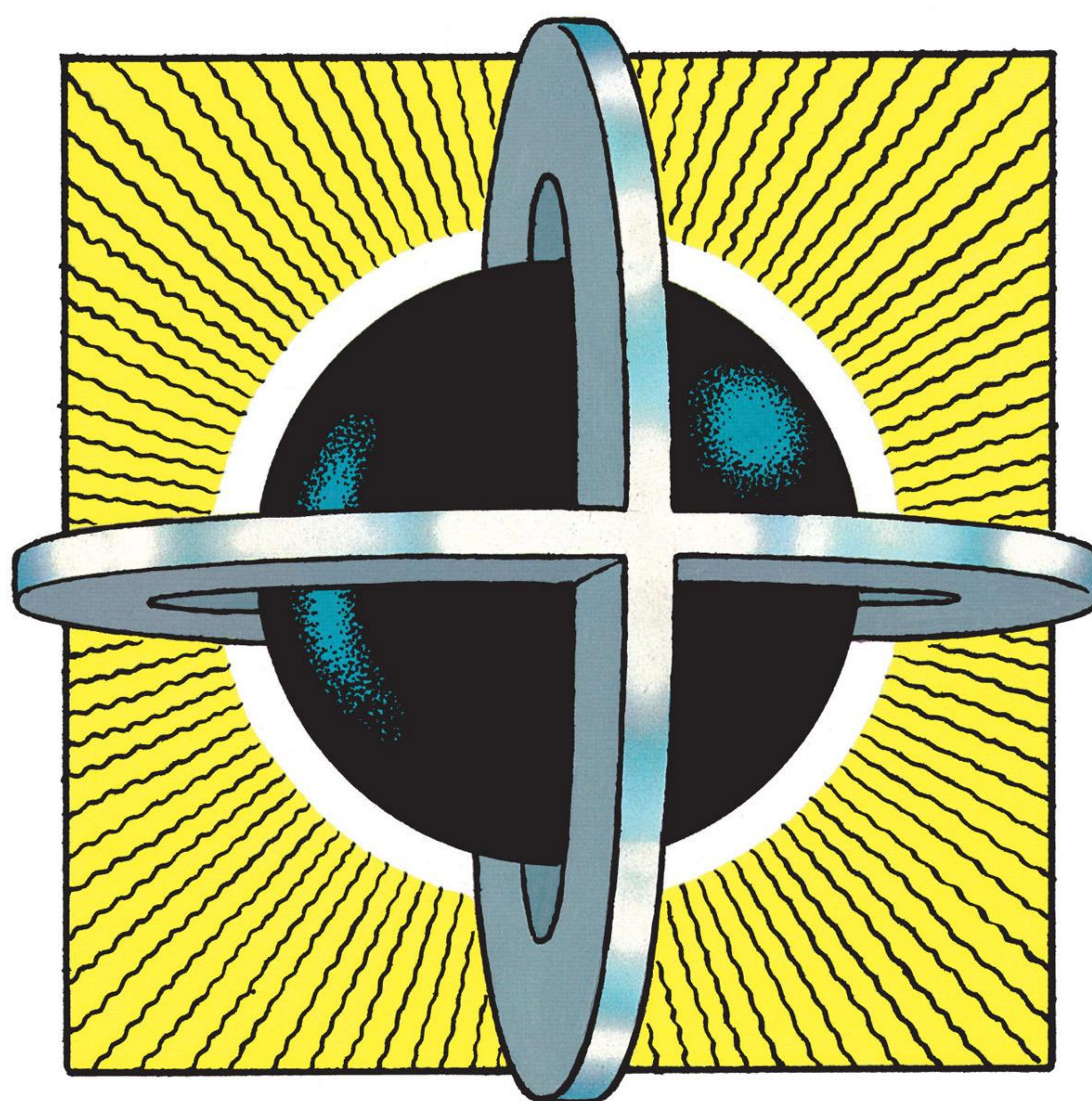
EDGAR P. JACOBS



9th CINEBOOK
The 9th Art Publisher

EDGAR P. JACOBS

THE TIME TRAP



AS THIS STORY IS ABOUT TO BEGIN, WE FIND OURSELVES IN THE SMOKING ROOM OF HOTEL LOUVOIS IN PARIS. CAPTAIN BLAKE, PASSING THROUGH THE FRENCH CAPITAL, IS WAITING FOR HIS OLD FRIEND PROFESSOR MORTIMER. THE LATTER, SUMMONED BY MR LESAGE, SOLICITOR, TO HEAR A COMMUNICATION CONCERNING HIM, IS LATE. AN IDLE BLAKE CANNOT HELP BUT OVERHEAR THE CONVERSATION OF TWO GENTLEMEN SITTING NEARBY.

...What times we're living in! Look at the papers!... Danger of war! Nuclear threat! Revolutions! Social unrest! Disasters!... The entire world seems to be going mad... Our ancestors were decidedly wiser! Their ordered, peaceful lives kept them safe from such adventures... *Those were the good old days!*...

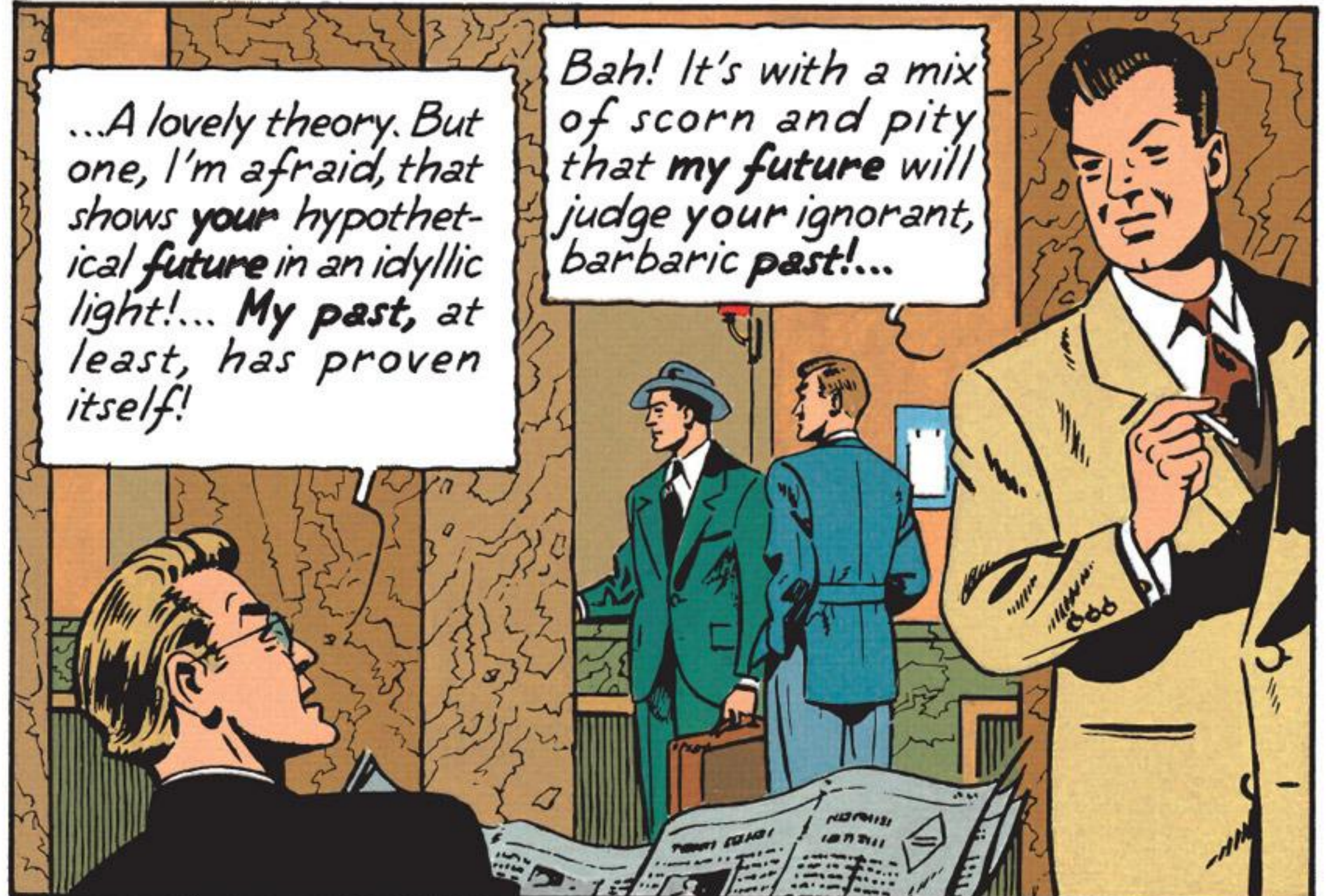
What tosh! Obscurantism and tyranny – that's what your 'good old days' were!...



...As for me, I prefer to look resolutely towards the future!... A new world is emerging before our eyes! Thanks to the extraordinary advances of science, mankind, freed from material servitudes, will finally be allowed to focus entirely on affairs of the mind!...

...A lovely theory. But one, I'm afraid, that shows *your* hypothetical future in an idyllic light!... *My past*, at least, has proven itself!

Bah! It's with a mix of scorn and pity that *my future* will judge your ignorant, barbaric past!...



BLAKE CAN'T HELP BUT MUTTER TO HIMSELF...

Hmm!... Past... Future... Who knows – maybe the 'good days' you dream of are simply ...the present ones, gentlemen!...



BUT NOW COMES A VERY AGITATED PROFESSOR MORTIMER, ENTERING THE SMOKING ROOM AT LAST...

Hello, Philip!... So, that rich uncle?...

Sorry to keep you waiting but...



HANDING HIS FRIEND AN ENVELOPE, MORTIMER CONTINUES...

...Here, read what the solicitor gave me!...



My dear colleague,

By the time you read this letter, I will have left this world – without regret. But I leave behind an invention that I can without false modesty call **extraordinary**!

While you were certainly my enemy, you were a loyal one. Your admirable character as well as your extensive knowledge make you worthy of receiving my legacy.

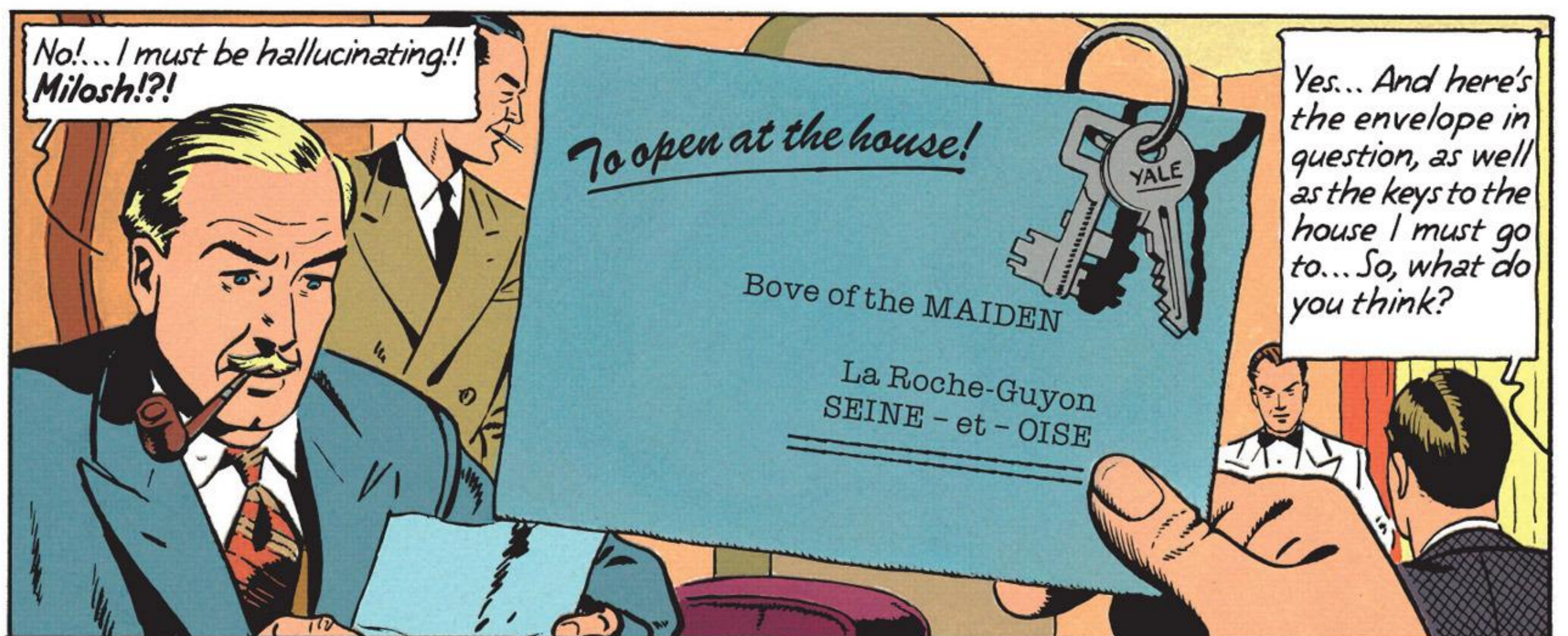
But as this represents a scientific advance of **incalculable** significance, I'm forced to act with the utmost caution. Which is why you will find my detailed instructions in the attached envelope.

If, however, you aren't willing to accept my bequest under the prescribed conditions, said envelope will be destroyed by Mr Lesage.

Yours in science,

Milosh.

No!... I must be hallucinating!!
Milosh!?!



Yes... And here's the envelope in question, as well as the keys to the house I must go to... So, what do you think?

I must say... It's so far-fetched I have to wonder whether it's some sort of bad joke ...



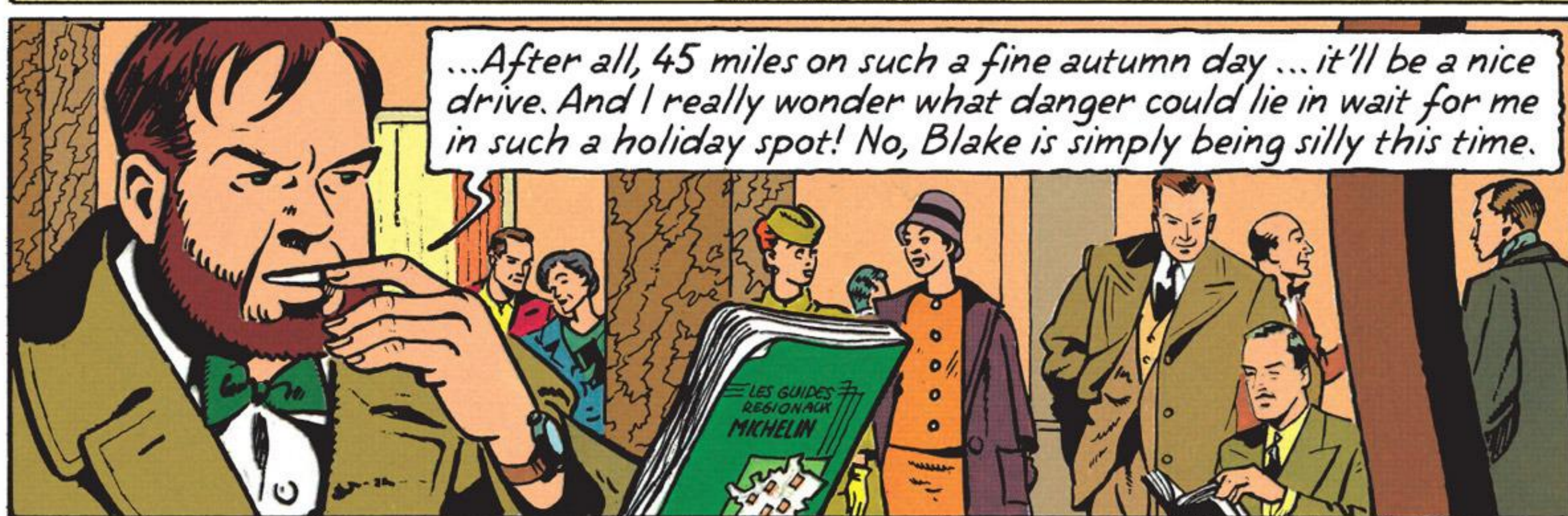
From whom?... You know very well that, for political reasons, the truth about the whole **meteors*** business was kept secret – and even more so the name of Professor Milosh!... So, who...?



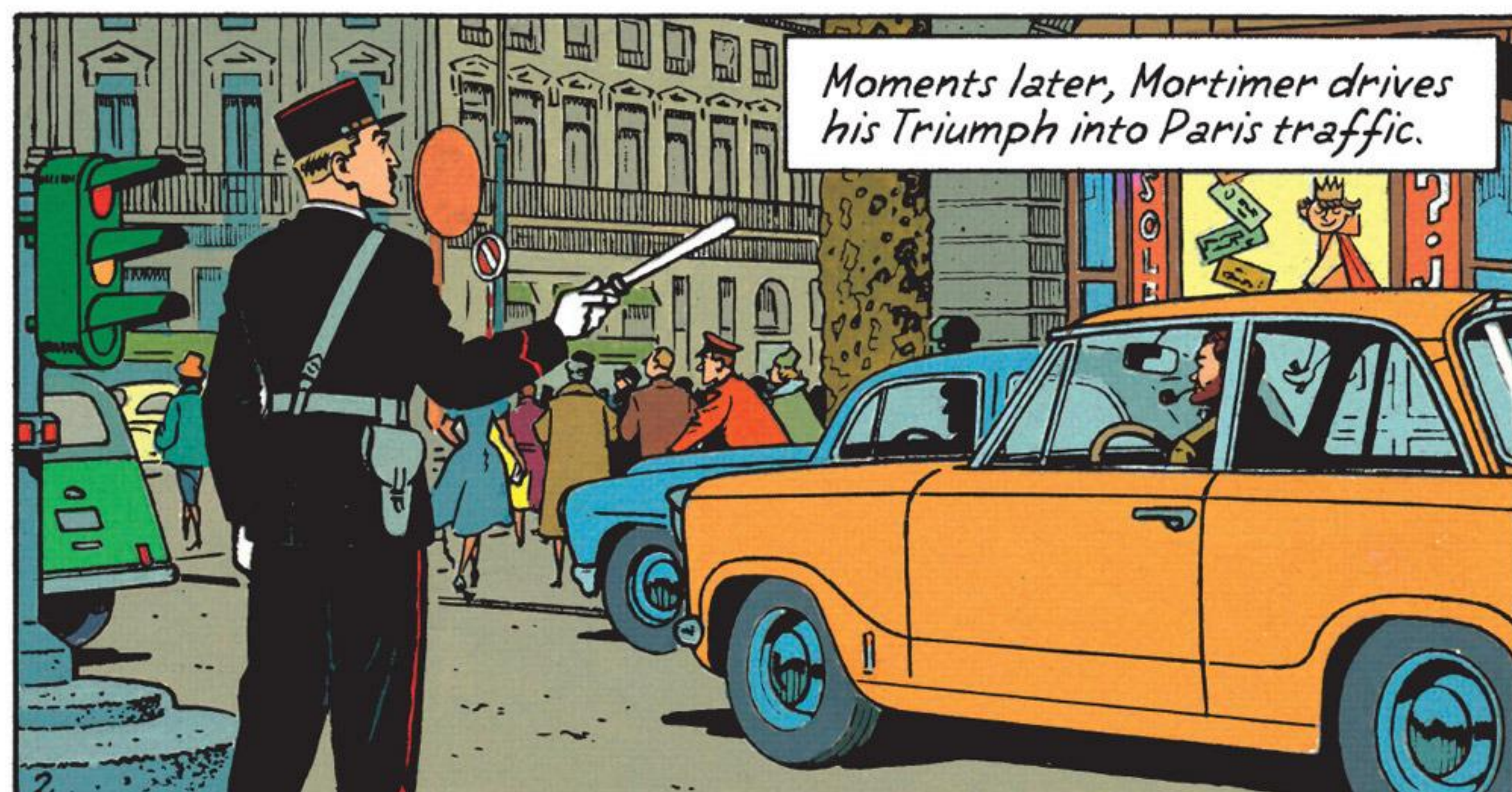
*SEE SOS METEORS



LEFT ALONE, A HESITANT MORTIMER HAS TURNED BACK TO HIS GUIDE, IDLY FLIPPING THROUGH IT AS HE THINKS...



THAT LAST ARGUMENT HAVING FINALLY WON OVER THE CAUTIONARY ADVICE OF HIS FRIEND, THE PROFESSOR CLOSES HIS GUIDE AND QUICKLY GOES UPSTAIRS TO PREPARE HIMSELF. TEN MINUTES LATER, HE STOPS AT THE FRONT DESK.



...Anyway, at a pinch I can always take my pistol...

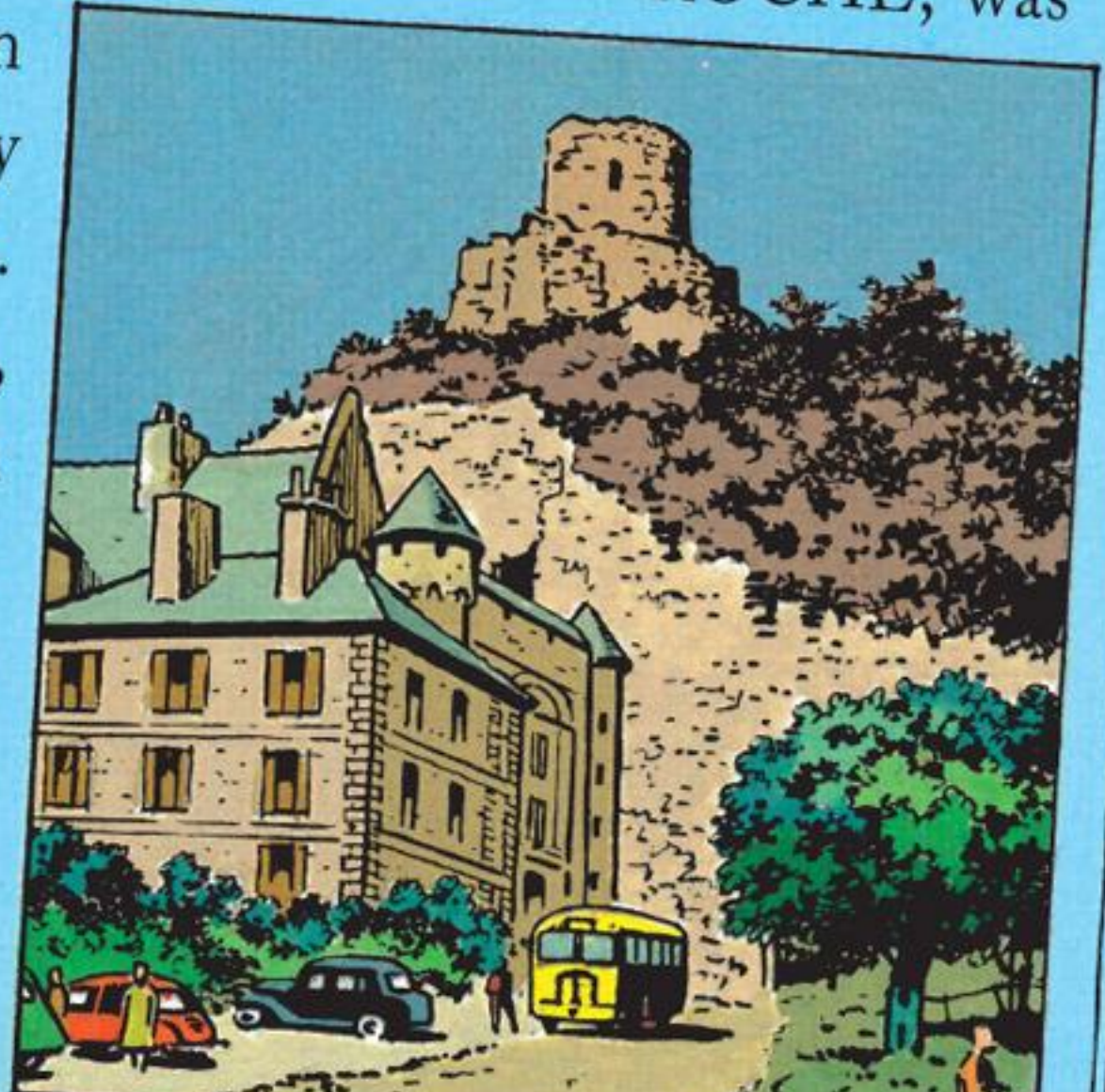
La ROCHE - GUYON ★

La Roche-Guyon is located in one of the most beautiful spots of the Seine valley, between a bend of the river and sheer, high cliffs topped by a 10th-century keep. During summer, many visitors come, drawn by the site, the castle and the wonderful panoramic views.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Perched like an eagle's nest on a spur of the ridge, between France and Normandy, the fortress was the site of much fighting, and the stakes to a long succession of plots, treasons, violence and murders. With a second keep built at the bottom of the cliff, the castle - its entire infrastructure buried and carved into the mountain's limestone - equalled the strength of CHATEAU-GAILLARD or GISORS.

A quaint legend remains attached to these venerable ruins. It is said that during the peasant uprisings of the 14th century, Lady AGNES, daughter of Sir GUI DE LA ROCHE, was miraculously saved from the fury of the rebels by a devil with a fiery beard. Not long ago, the 'BOVE', or cave, through which they escaped could still be seen. It is now enclosed in the cellars of one of the old houses around the parish church. (NO VISITORS allowed.)

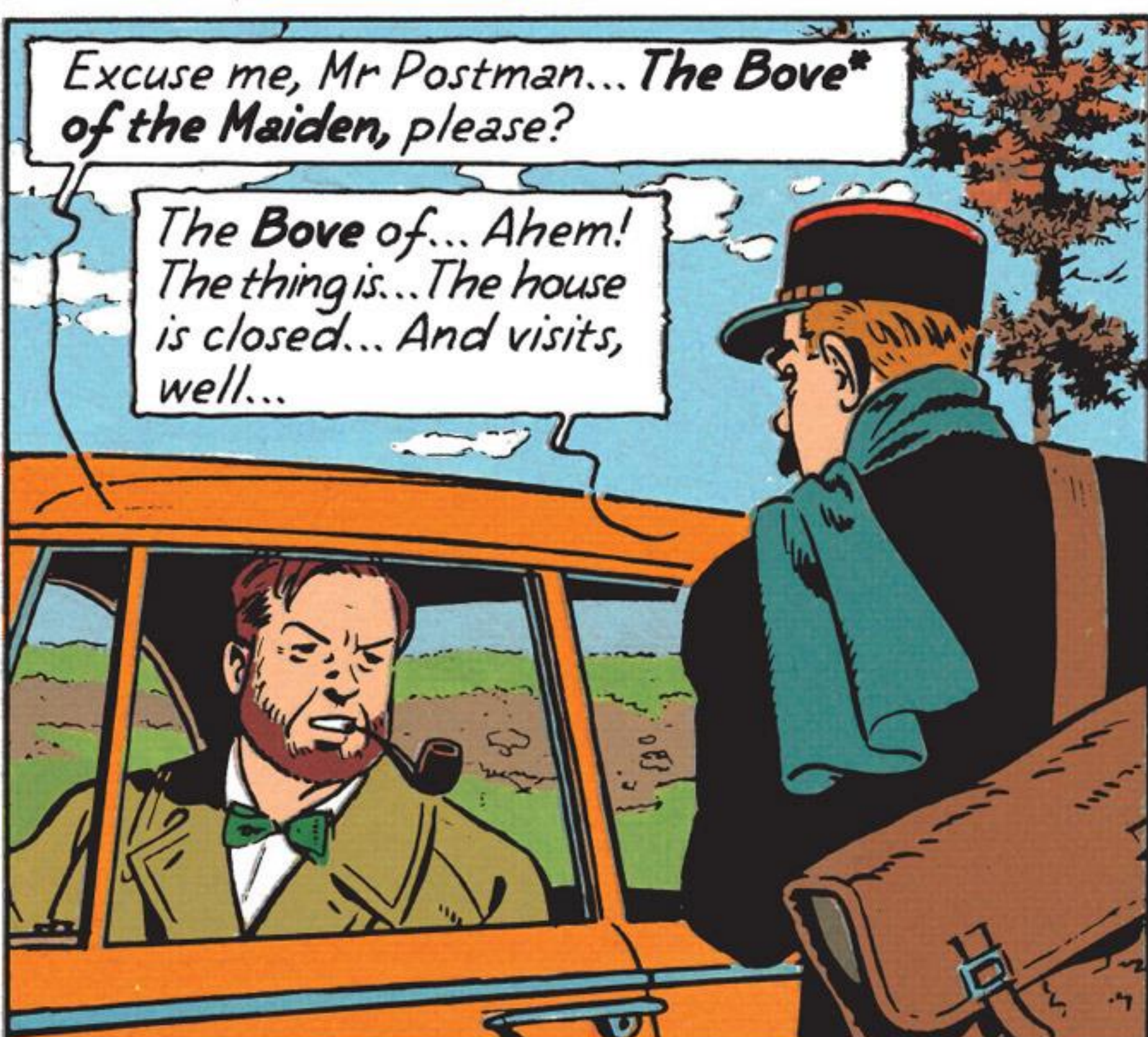
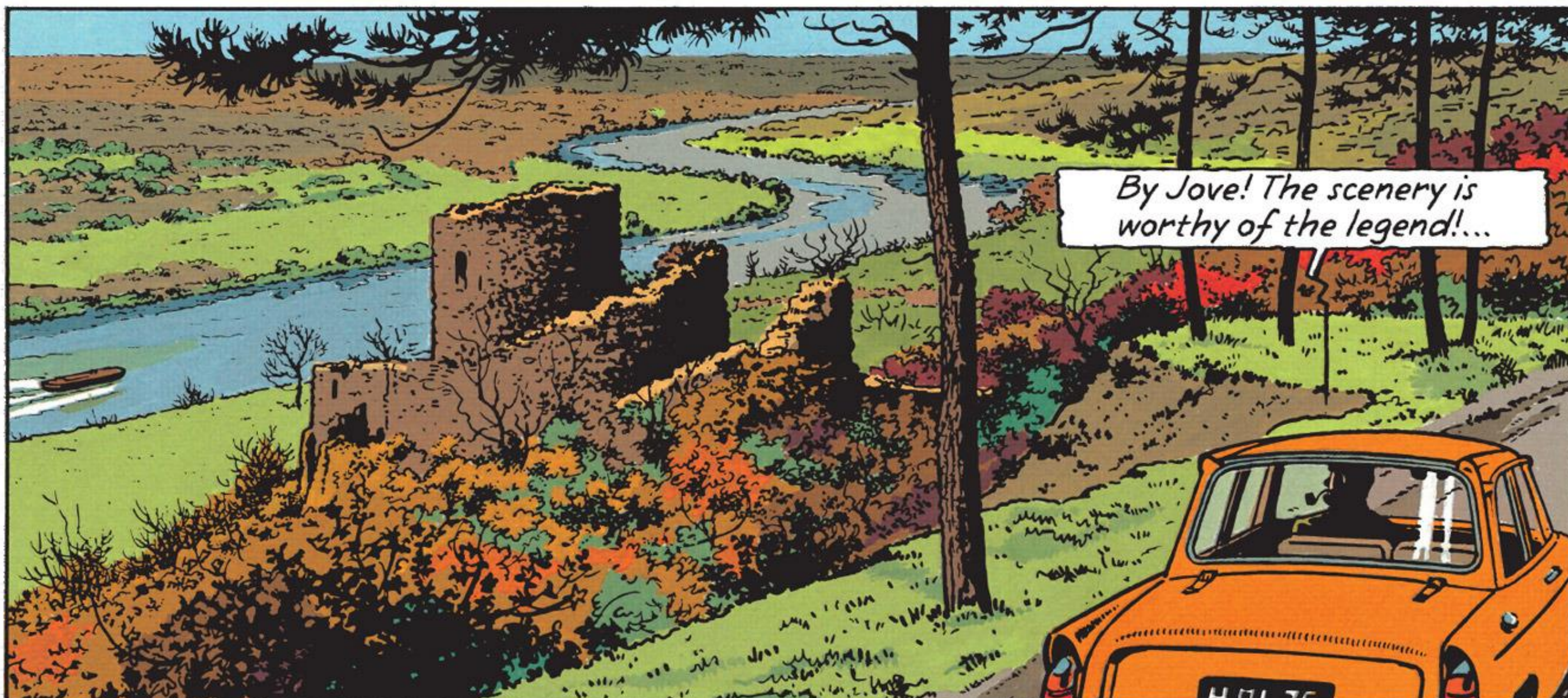


*SEE SOS METEORS

TWO HOURS LATER, ON ROAD D100, MORTIMER – HAVING OPTED FOR THE PICTURESQUE 'RIDGE-TOP ROUTE' – IS ONLY A FEW MILES AWAY FROM LA ROCHE-GUYON. EVEN AS HE DRIVES, HE REFLECTS ON THE LATE-PROFESSOR MILOSH'S STRANGE PERSONALITY...



BUT SUDDENLY, STRETCHING ALL THE WAY TO THE HORIZON, THE GRANDIOSE PANORAMA OF THE SEINE VALLEY COMES INTO VIEW. AT THE BOTTOM, THE FAMOUS BEND OF THE RIVER AND IN THE FOREGROUND, BURIED IN THE RED FOLIAGE, THE MIGHTY KEEP OF LA ROCHE-GUYON...



Yes, I know. But I'm not here as a tourist. I'm ... er... the new owner... But ... what is it, my good man?

Oh, nothing, sir. Nothing... The Bove, hmm!... It's the Bove!... Well, it's your business, after all... Fine! Then, turn left onto road 313 to the square and climb up to the church... The Bove is right next to it... There's a small statue just above the door... Good evening to you, sir!...



SOMEWHAT PERPLEXED BY THE POSTMAN'S STRANGE RELUCTANCE, MORTIMER DRIVES ON AND, FOLLOWING A WINDING ROAD BORDERED BY OLD CAVE DWELLINGS, ARRIVES AT THE VILLAGE.

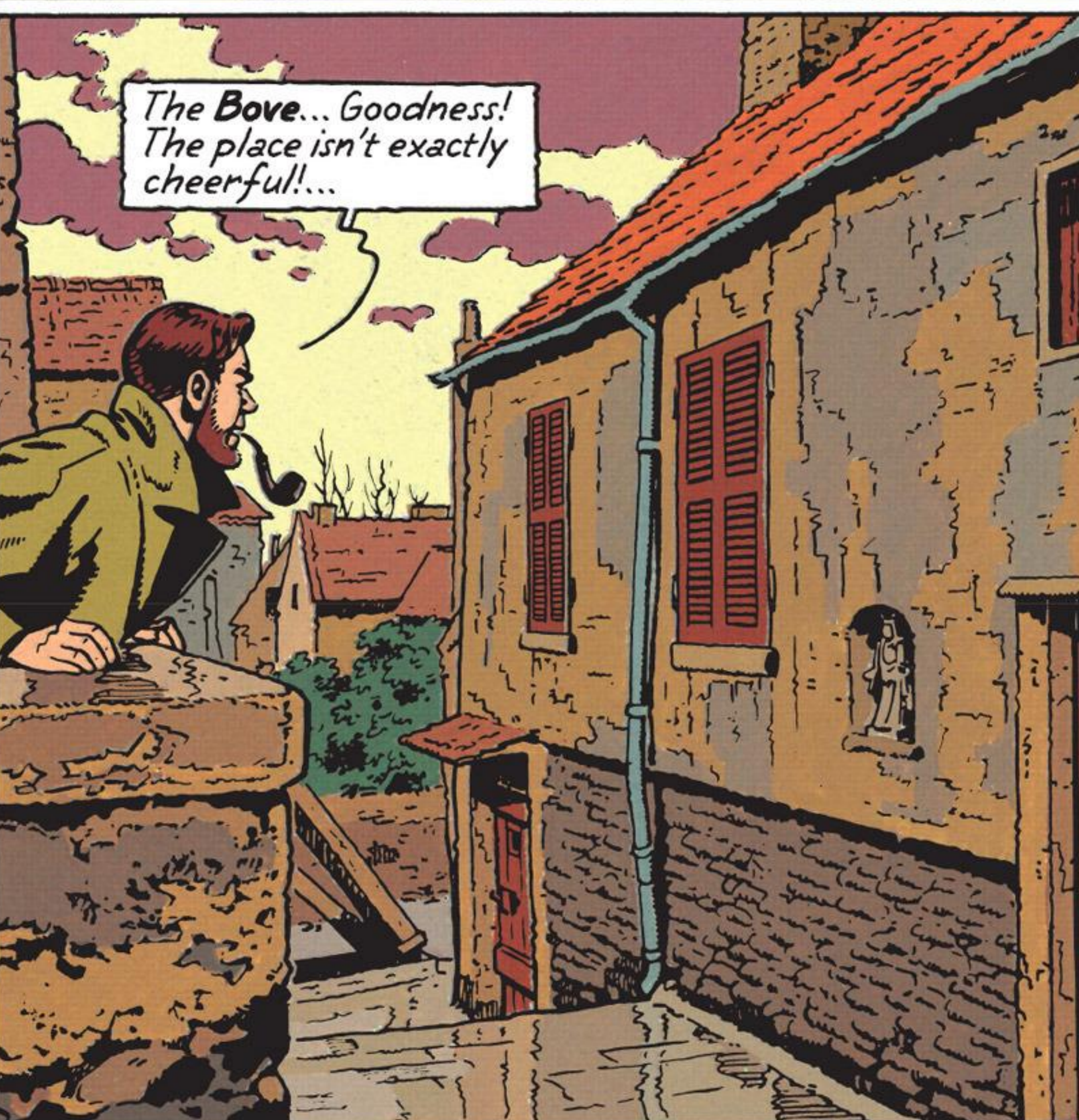
BUT BY THEN EVENING HAS ARRIVED AND THE CHEERFUL SUN HAS GIVEN WAY TO A CHILL DRIZZLE. SO WHEN MORTIMER STOPS ON THE CENTRAL SQUARE, HE IS RATHER SURPRISED TO FIND THE PLACE DESERTED...



LEAVING HIS CAR AT THE FOOT OF THE CASTLE, THE PROFESSOR WALKS UP TOWARDS THE CHURCH. BUT HIS SURPRISE ONLY GROWS, AS THERE'S NOTHING THERE OF THE MERRY SUMMER BUSTLE DESCRIBED IN THE GUIDE. THE STREETS ARE EMPTY, THE OLD HOUSES SILENT.



BUT UPON REACHING THE CHURCH SQUARE, HE LOOKS BELOW AND SEES A HOUSE WITH CLOSED SHUTTERS BY A FLIGHT OF WORN STAIRS. ON THE DILAPIDATED FAÇADE IS A STONE FIGURE.



ANXIOUS IN SPITE OF HIMSELF, MORTIMER WALKS TO THE DOOR, BREAKS THE SEALS AND, PULLING OUT THE KEY, UNLOCKS THE ENTRANCE...



HE STOPS ON THE DARK DOORSTEP, HIS NOSE ASSAILED BY A PENETRATING SMELL OF MOULD...



*A REGIONAL NAME FOR TROGLODYTE LODGINGS CARVED IN CHALKY ROCK.

BUT SOON, IN THE DIM LIGHT, MORTIMER BEGINS TO MAKE OUT A ROOM WITH CRACKED WALLS, FILLED WITH A JUMBLE OF ODD OBJECTS AND RICKETY FURNITURE INDICATIVE OF EXTREME POVERTY...



CONSPICUOUS AMONG THE MESS, AN OIL LAMP SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN LEFT THERE FOR HIM...



AFTER LIGHTING THE LAMP AND CLOSING THE DOOR, THE PROFESSOR PULLS THE SECOND ENVELOPE FROM HIS POCKET...



My dear fellow,

The time has come for you to receive your inheritance. I shall say it again: if I chose you, my former adversary, it is simply because I consider you to be the only one capable of appreciating my invention, and the only one entitled to use it!

Although I miraculously escaped the destruction of the '001' alive, I received such a frightful dose of radiation that I decided to hole up in here and spend the few months I had left completing a machine I had been working on in secret for a long time. A machine that should have been the crowning achievement of my career: the Chronoscaph!!! Yes, you read it right. That fantastic dream of science-fiction authors, that device capable of transporting a man to the time of his choice, past or future... **It exists**, and it is yours! I have tested it, and what it taught me allows me, at the final moment, to leave in peace!!!...

Your turn now, Professor! But first, follow the instructions included carefully. They will allow you access my secret laboratory. The rest will come methodically.

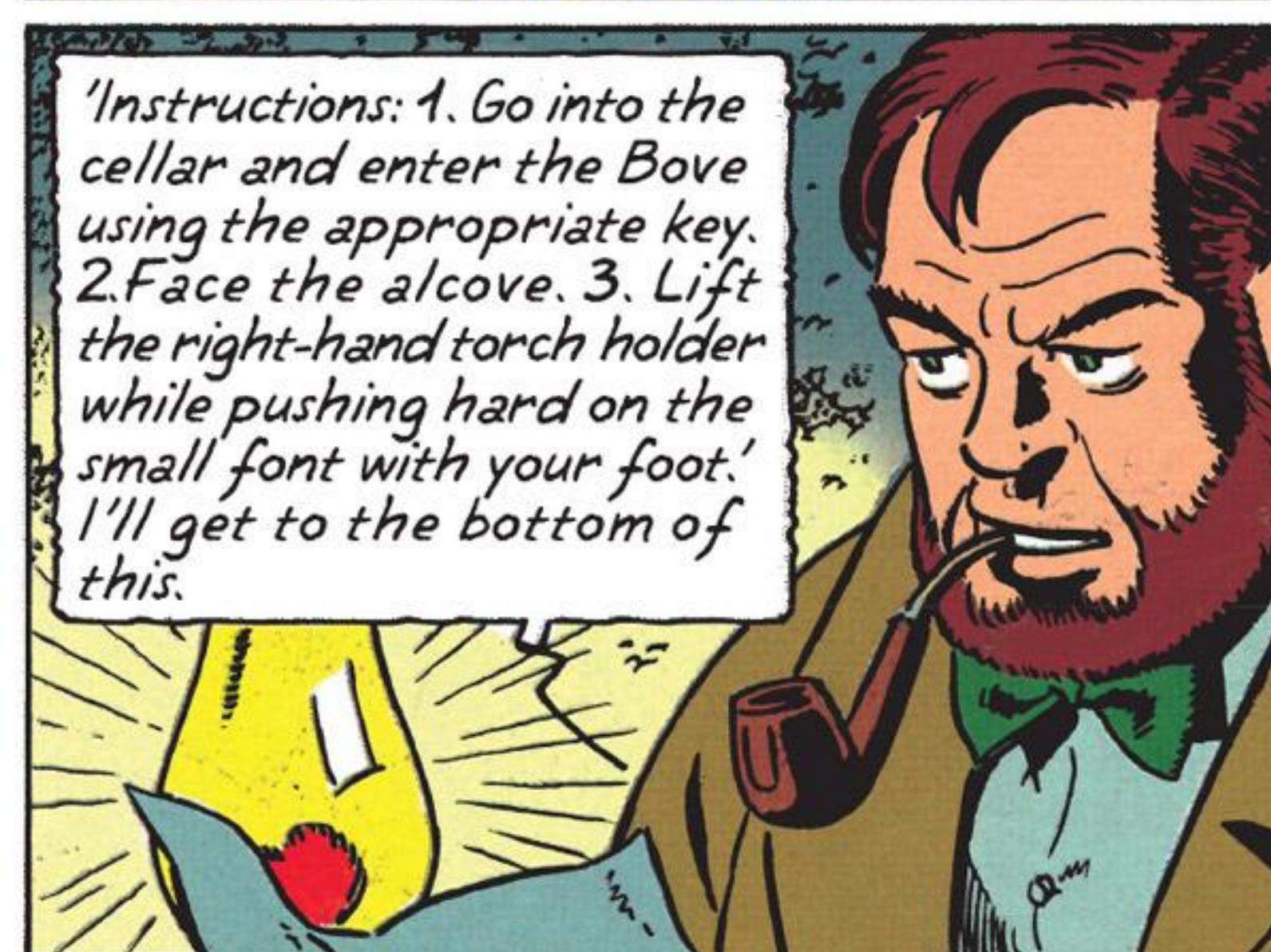
Farewell, my dear fellow. Good luck, and no hard feelings.

Milosh

THE ASTOUNDING MESSAGE LEAVES OUR FRIEND STUNNED...



BUT MORTIMER CAN'T STOP HIMSELF FROM READING ON...



DETERMINED, HE HEADS DOWN INTO THE CELLAR WHERE HE SOON DISCOVERS A DOOR LOCKED WITH A LARGE PADLOCK.



...HAVING WALKED THROUGH THE DOOR, MORTIMER FINDS HIMSELF IN A SMALL NOOK CARVED INTO THE CHALKY ROCK. INSIDE AN ALCOVE IN THE BACK WALL IS A ROUGH STATUE OF THE VIRGIN.

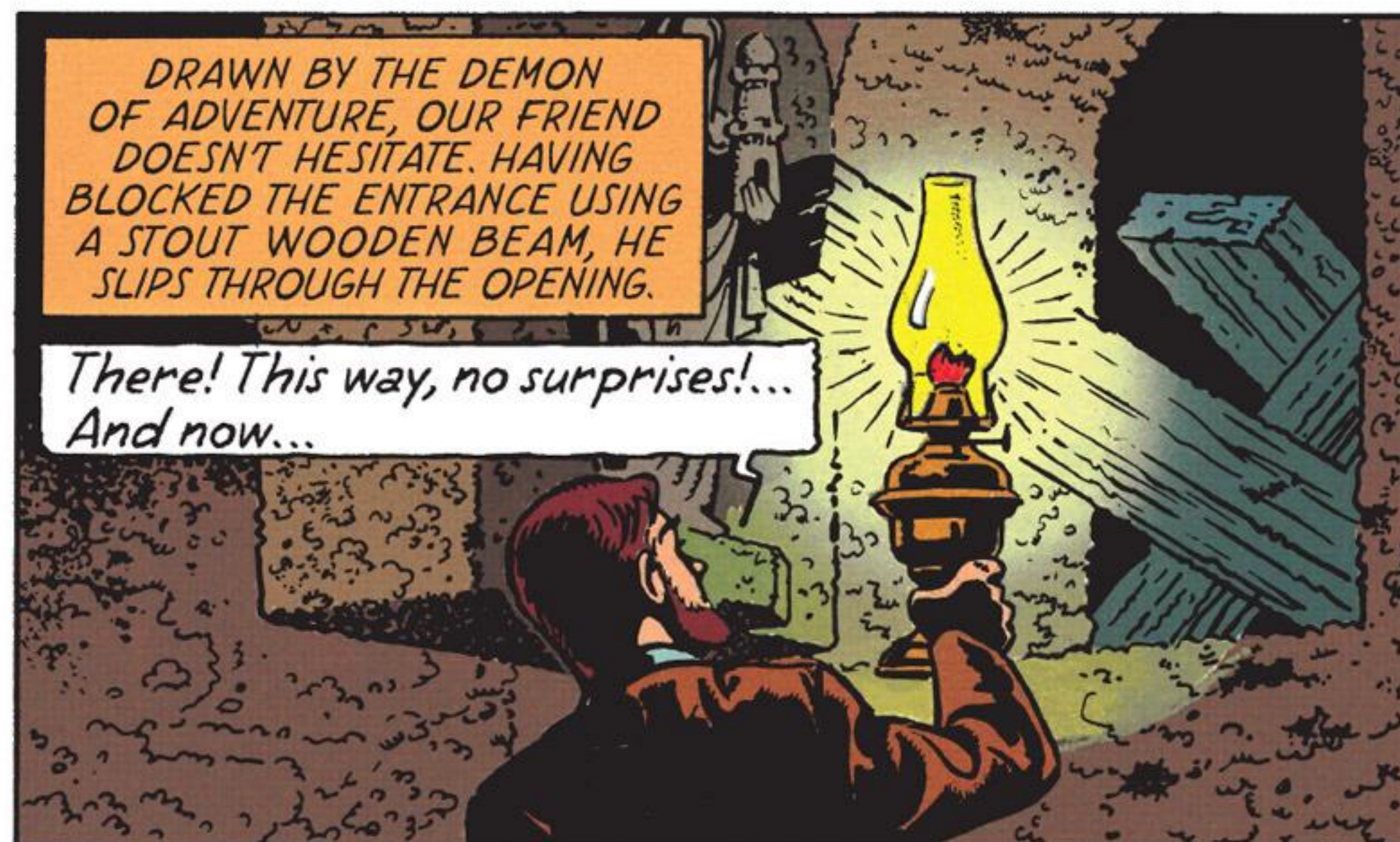


IMMEDIATELY, THE BACK OF THE ALCOVE SWINGS OPEN, WITH THE STATUE ATTACHED TO IT...



DRAWN BY THE DEMON OF ADVENTURE, OUR FRIEND DOESN'T HESITATE. HAVING BLOCKED THE ENTRANCE USING A STOUT WOODEN BEAM, HE SLIPS THROUGH THE OPENING.

There! This way, no surprises!... And now...



BUT NO SOONER HAS HE SET FOOT ON THE FIRST STEP THAN THE HEAVY SLAB SWIVELS BACK IN PLACE, SNAPPING THE STANCHION. AT THE SAME INSTANT, MORTIMER RECEIVES A VIOLENT BLOW TO THE HEAD THAT KNOCKS HIM OUT AND SENDS HIM ROLLING DOWN TO THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS.



WHEN THE PROFESSOR COMES TO, HE FEELS COMPELLED TO CURSE HIS OWN RECKLESSNESS!

What a damned fool I am!... And dead or alive, Milosh really pulled it off!... But if he thinks he's letting me rot in here, he's mistaken! In a couple of days Blake will be here and, knowing him, he'll pull this house apart to find me — one stone at a time if need be!... So it's just a question of time and patience.



SOMEWHAT COMFORTED BY THIS TRAIN OF THOUGHT, HE CASTS A SURPRISED GLANCE AROUND AND DISCOVERS A VAST CRYPT. BATHED IN A STRANGE, DIM LIGHT, A MULTITUDE OF MACHINES LIE THERE, SAVAGELY SABOTAGED, STILL LINKED TOGETHER BY A JUMBLE OF WIRES AND CABLES...

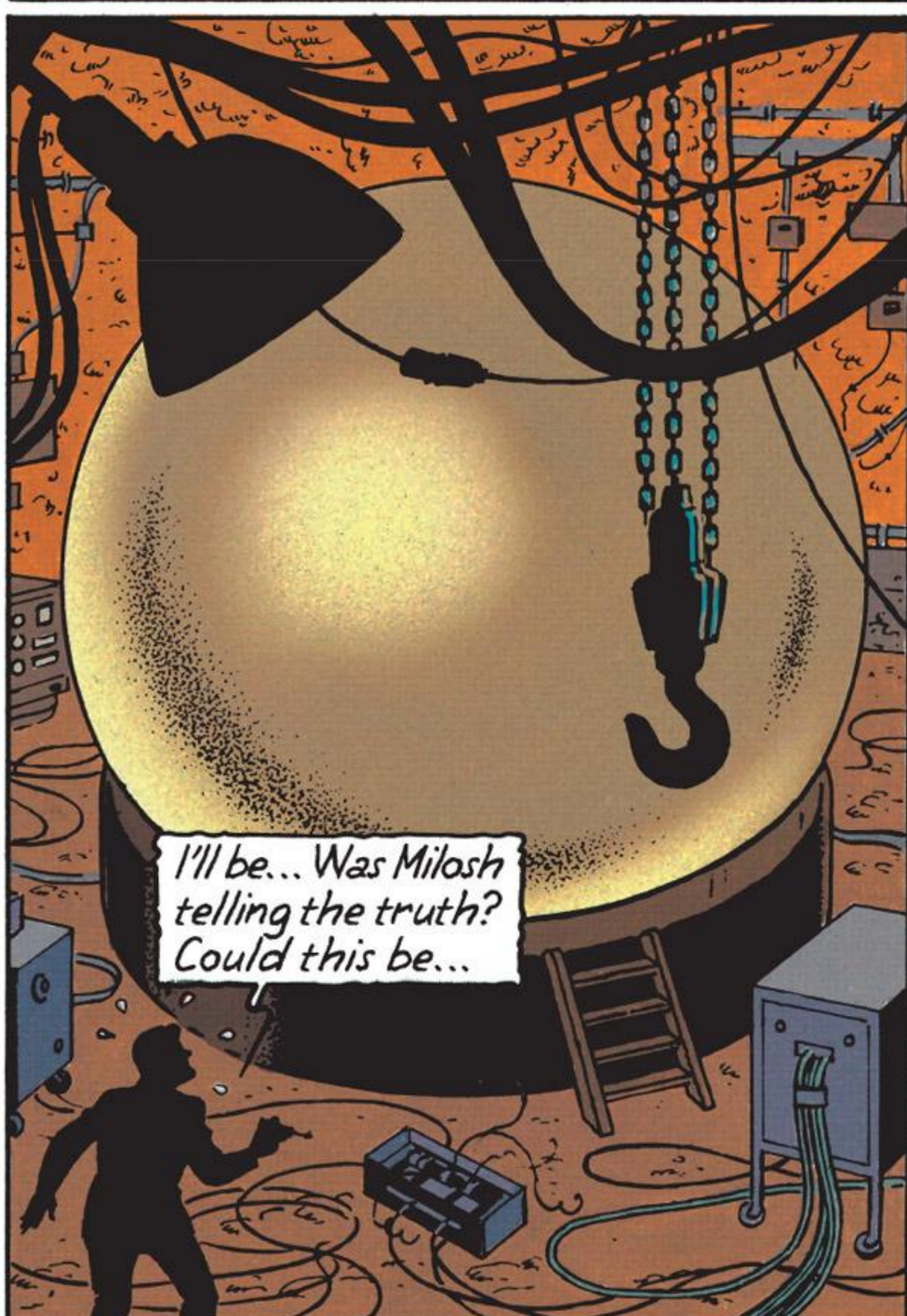


CAREFULLY, PISTOL IN HAND, MORTIMER STEPS FORWARD AMID THE SHATTERED DEBRIS OF THE STRANGE LABORATORY. BUT SUDDENLY, AS HE REACHES A SORT OF TRANSEPT, HE'S ROOTED TO THE SPOT!...

Oh!

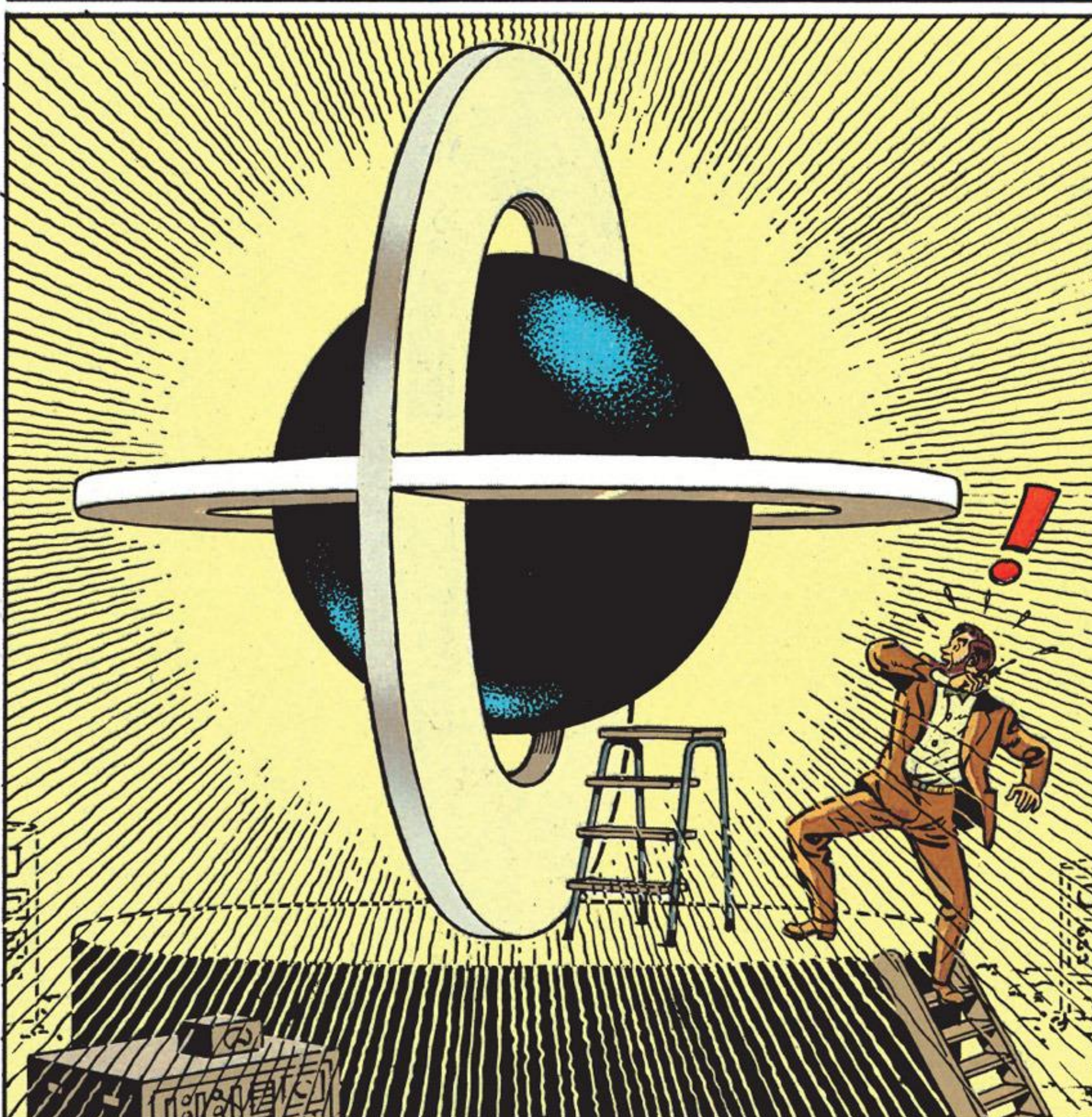


THERE, LIKE A GIANT BALL, A GLISTENING, ALMOST UNREAL DOME RESTS ON A METAL PLATFORM...



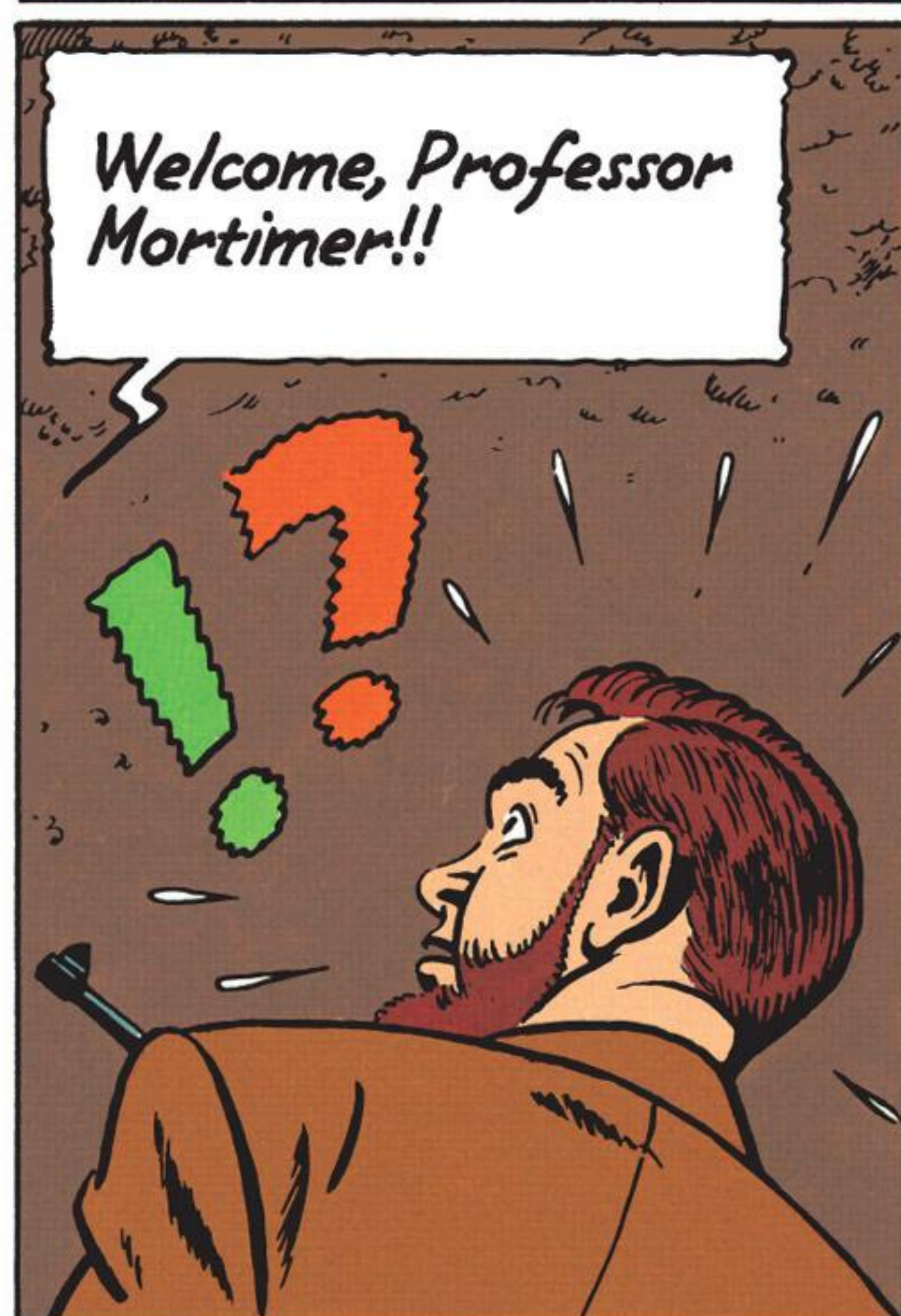
I'll be... Was Milosh telling the truth? Could this be...

INTRIGUED BUT CAUTIOUS, MORTIMER APPROACHES THE OBJECT... BUT AS HE SETS FOOT ON THE PLATFORM, THE DOME BURSTS ABRUPTLY, REVEALING A PECULIAR-LOOKING MACHINE... **THE CHRONOSCAPHE!**...



SIMULTANEOUSLY, A DEEP, LOUD VOICE — THE VOICE OF THE LATE MILOSH GEORGEVICH — CALLS OUT TO HIM:

Welcome, Professor Mortimer!!



MORTIMER LEAPS TO PUT HIS BACK TO THE WALL, TRYING TO LOCATE THE SPEAKER WHO CONTINUES, UNFAZED...

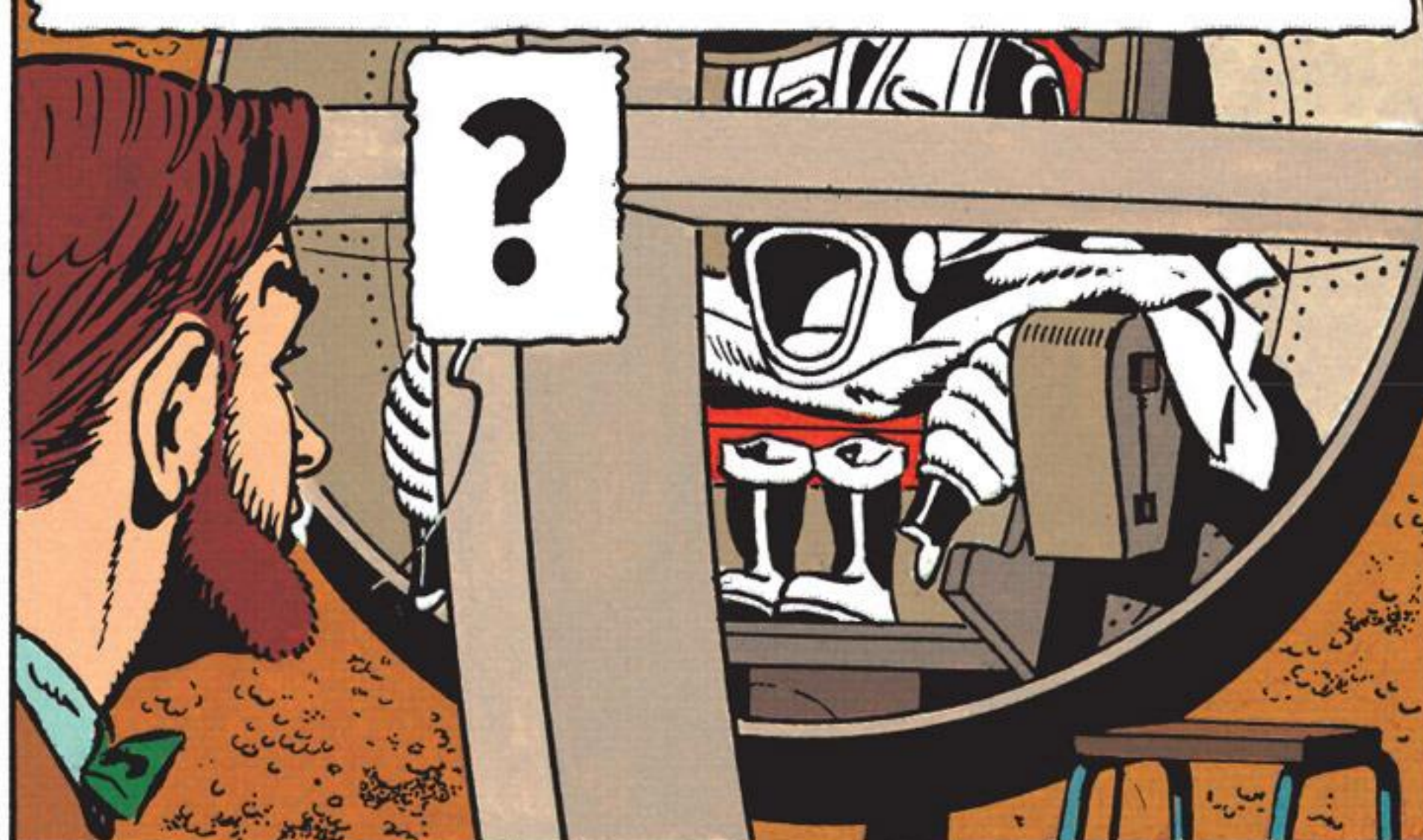
I'm glad, though hardly surprised, to see that your scientific curiosity was stronger than any caution... Do forgive me for shutting the secret door behind you. It was both a test of your nerves and a necessity. You see, only a man possessed of perfect self-control could safely attempt such a trip. And besides, a secret such as mine — and yours now — can never be sufficiently protected from the curiosity of the layman.

Heavens! I get it... A pre-recorded message on a magnetic tape; I triggered its playback when I stepped on the platform! Phew! That's better!!!



BUT THE VOICE IS ALREADY SPEAKING AGAIN, IN THE TONES OF A PE INSTRUCTOR ON THE RADIO, WHILE THE SPHERE OPENS SILENTLY, REVEALING A COCKPIT...

That said, in your interest, please follow these instructions step by step... To start with, please put on the special equipment that's on the machine's seat. Without it, you would face certain annihilation...



IS IT THE STRANGE LOCATION, THE BIZARRE ATMOSPHERE, THE PERSUASIVE TONE OF THAT VOICE FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE?... AT ANY RATE, A SEEMINGLY BEWITCHED MORTIMER OBEYS AND, OVERCOMING HIS DISTRUST...

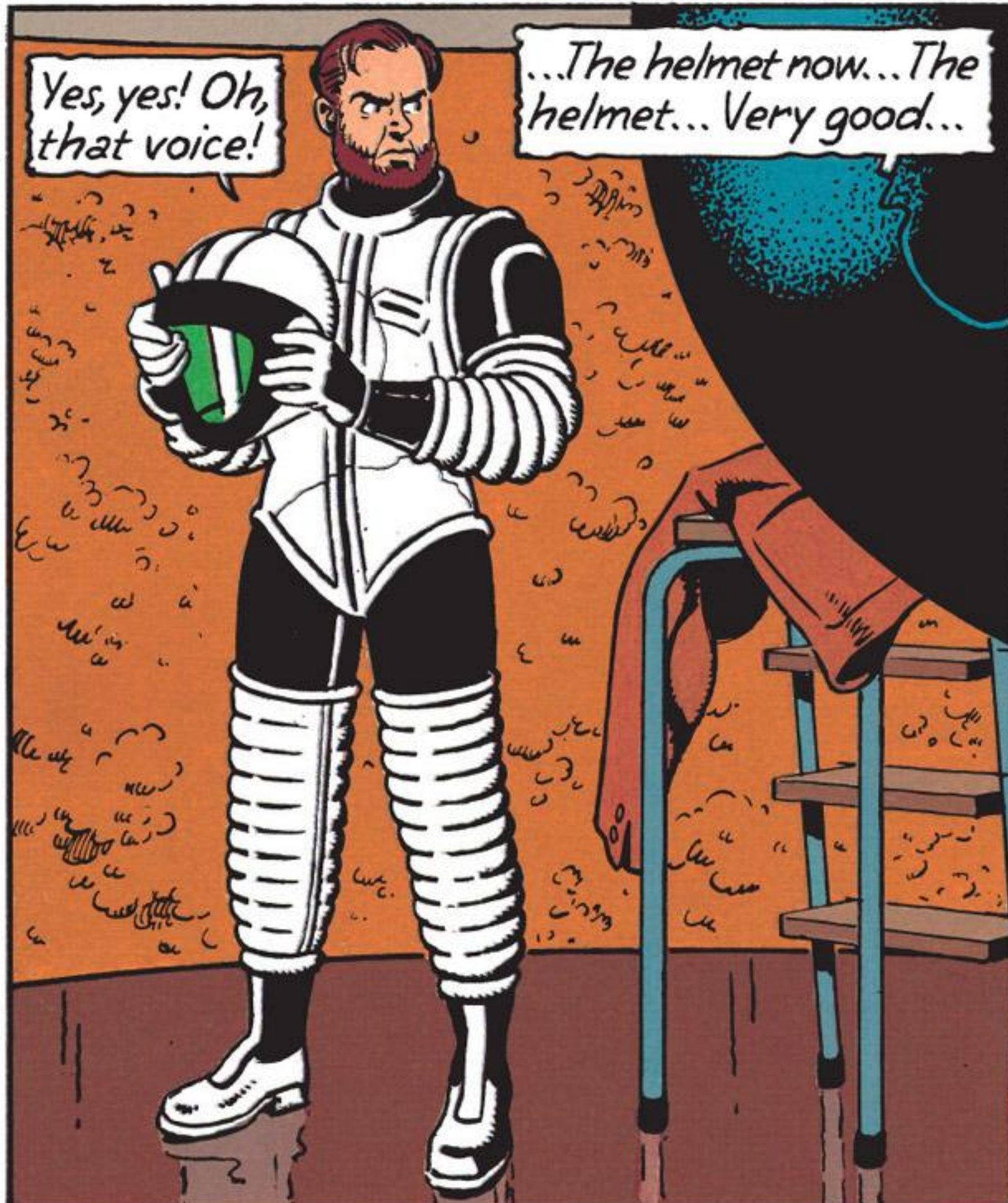
...BEGINS TO PUT ON THE INDICATED SUIT...

Very good... Very good... Check the seal.

If Blake could see me... But to hell with it — I'll take the risk!



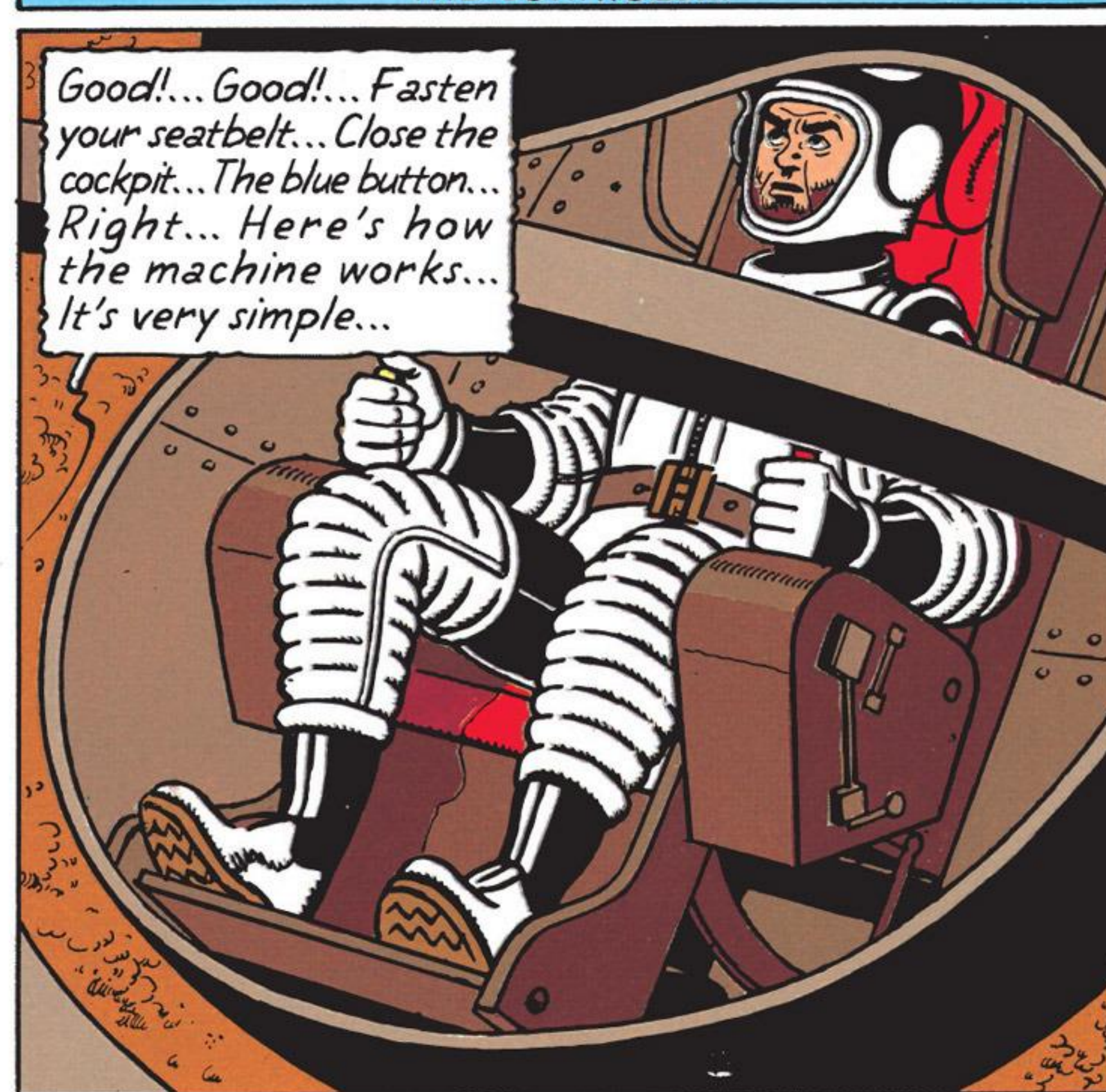
A SHORT TIME LATER, MORTIMER IS READY...



JUST AS IF HE WAS FOLLOWING HIS EVERY MOVEMENT, MILOSH GOES ON...

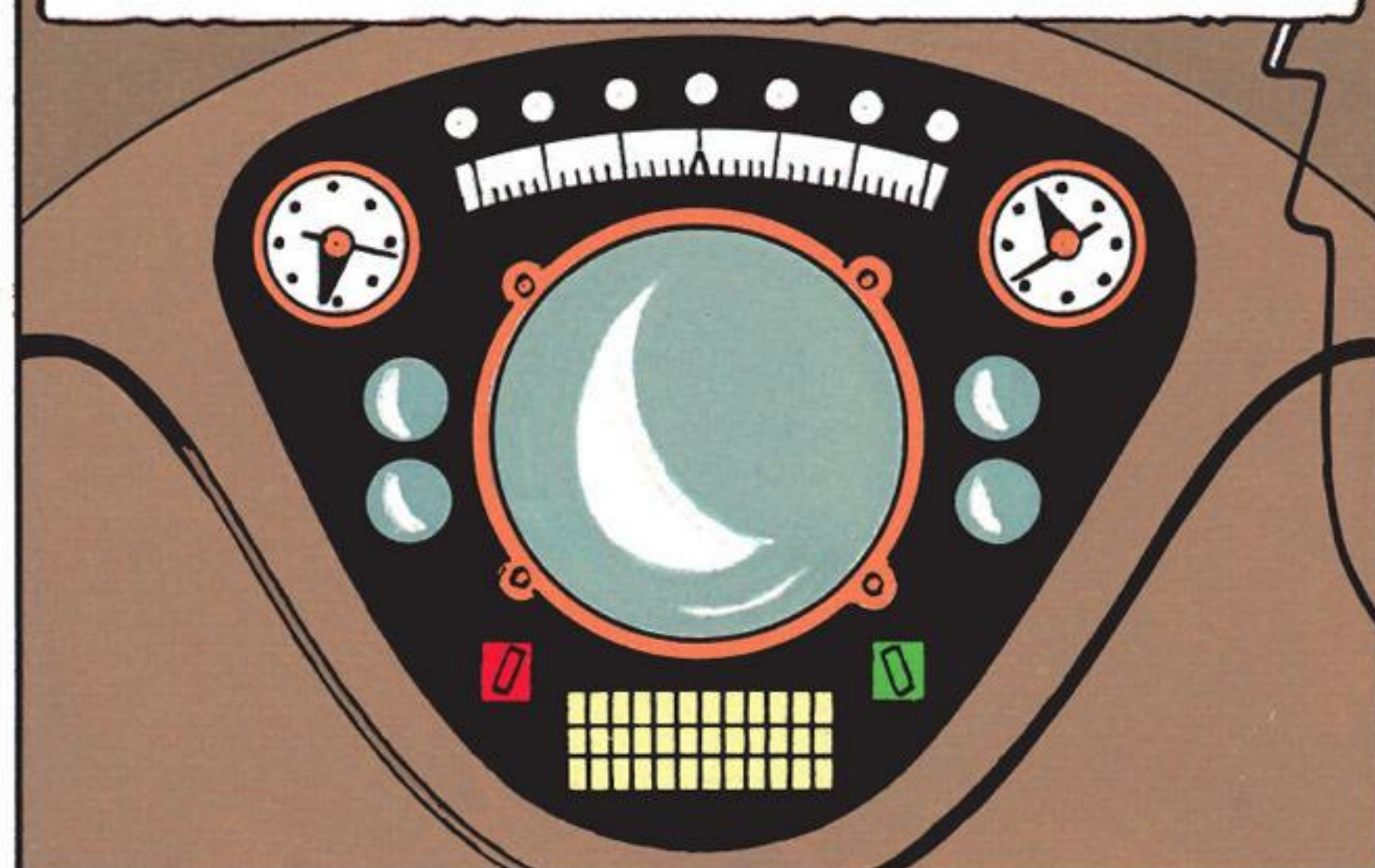


...AND SO MORTIMER, WHILE STILL ON THE LOOKOUT FOR A POTENTIAL SURPRISE, SOON FINDS HIMSELF AT THE CONTROLS...



MILOSH GOES ON EVEN AS THE SPHERE CLOSES OVER OUR HERO...

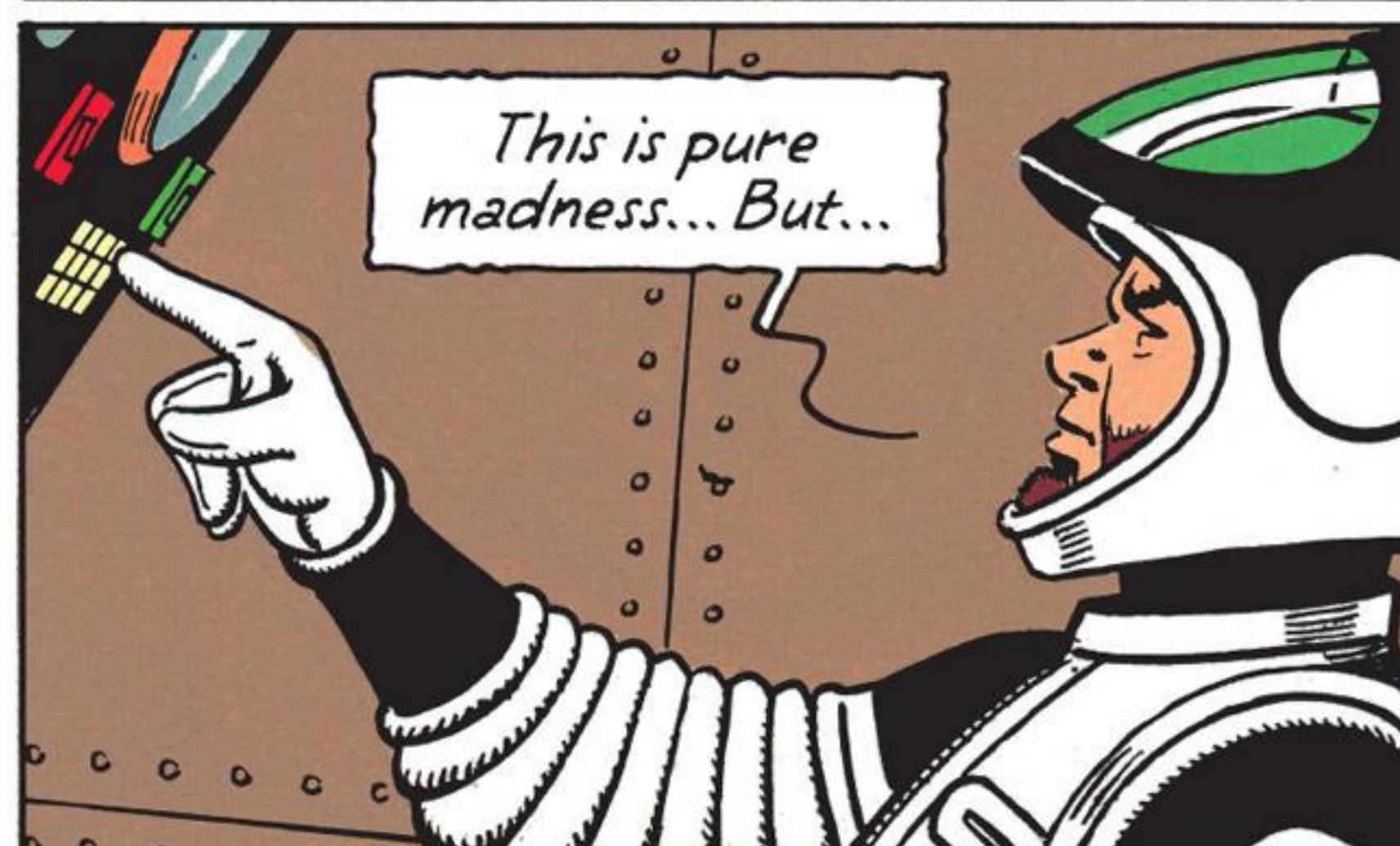
The main components of the dashboard are a **temporal selector** and two **levers** – one **red** for starting, the other **yellow** for stopping. The rest is irrelevant. Operations then consist of: 1. Set the **selector** to the chosen date by indicating the time period, **past** or **future**, that you wish to reach; 2. Pull the **red** start lever towards you!... That's all there is to it!... The machine stops automatically. However, if you wish to make a change of programme in mid-transfer, simply use the **yellow** stop lever!... That will do for now. Further instructions will be given as your initiation continues... Let me say it one more time: on the left, you **start**; on the right, you **stop**!... You're now ready to go!!



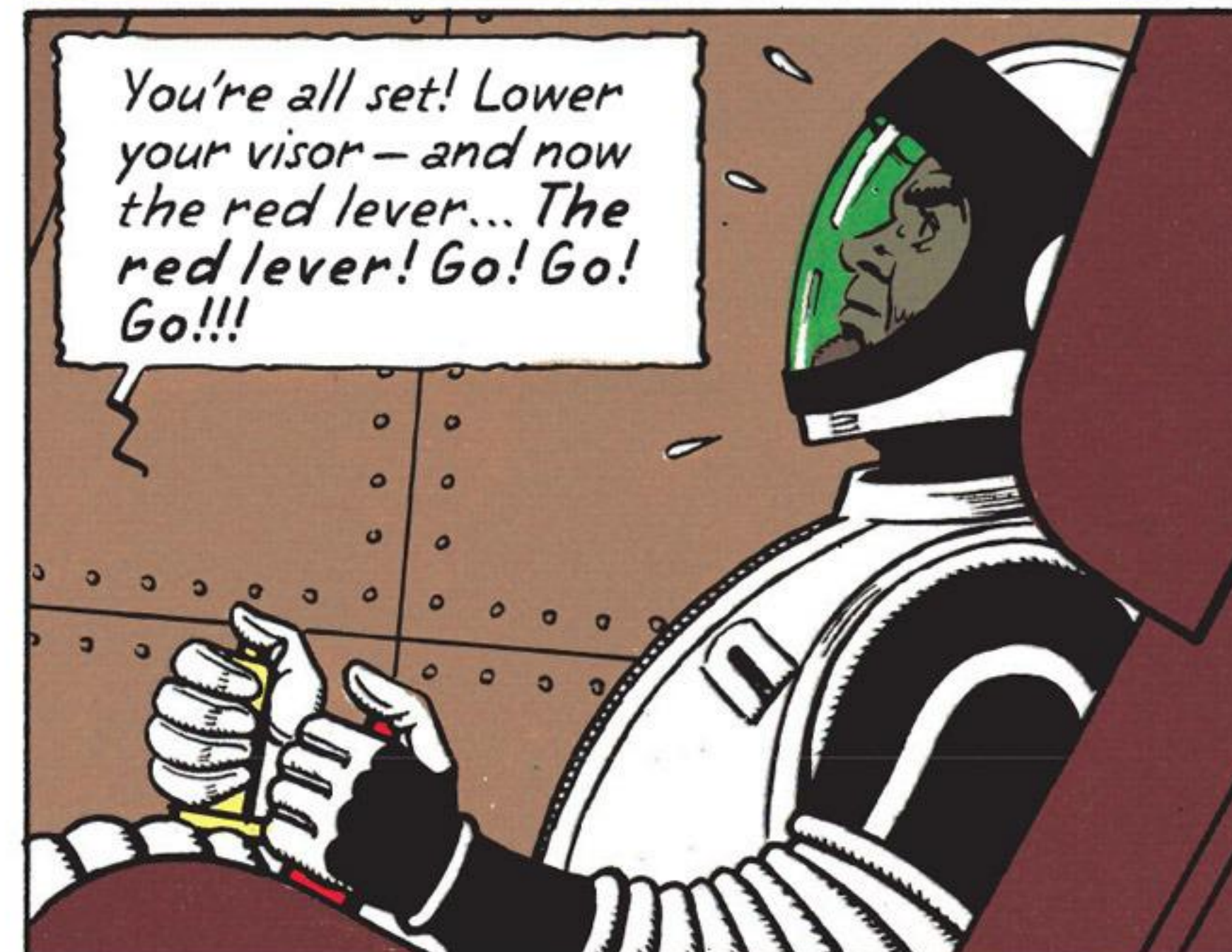
AND WITHOUT GIVING OUR FRIEND A CHANCE TO THINK, THE VOICE GOES ON, COMPELLING...



ALTHOUGH CONFUSED, MORTIMER CRAFTILY INPUTS A DATE FOR SIX MONTHS EARLIER, IN THE HOPE OF MEETING MILOSH, STILL ALIVE BACK THEN...



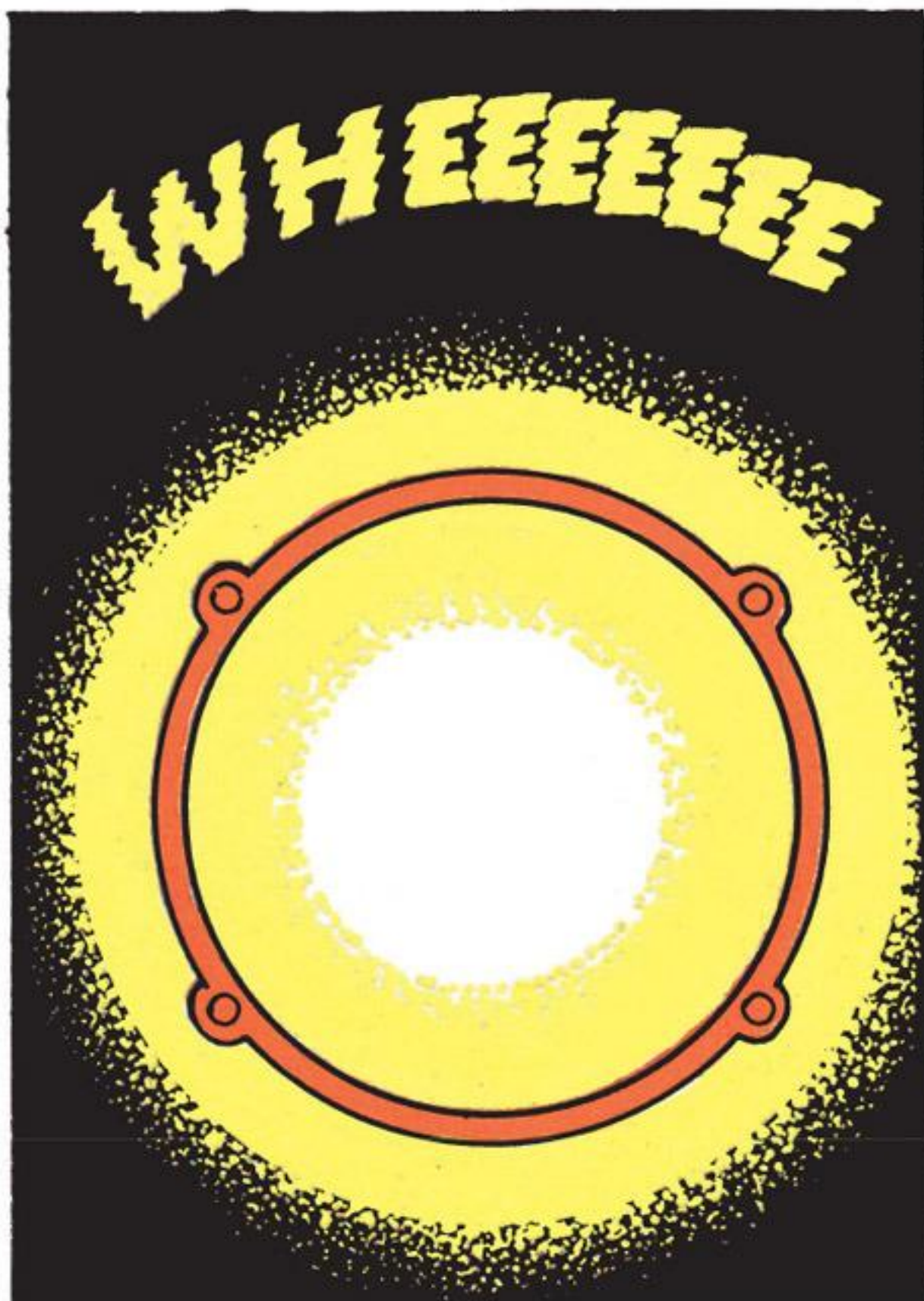
NOW INSISTENT, THE VOICE ORDERS...



RESOLUTELY, AS IF TO GET IT OVER WITH, MORTIMER GRABS THE RED LEVER AND PULLS IT BACK!



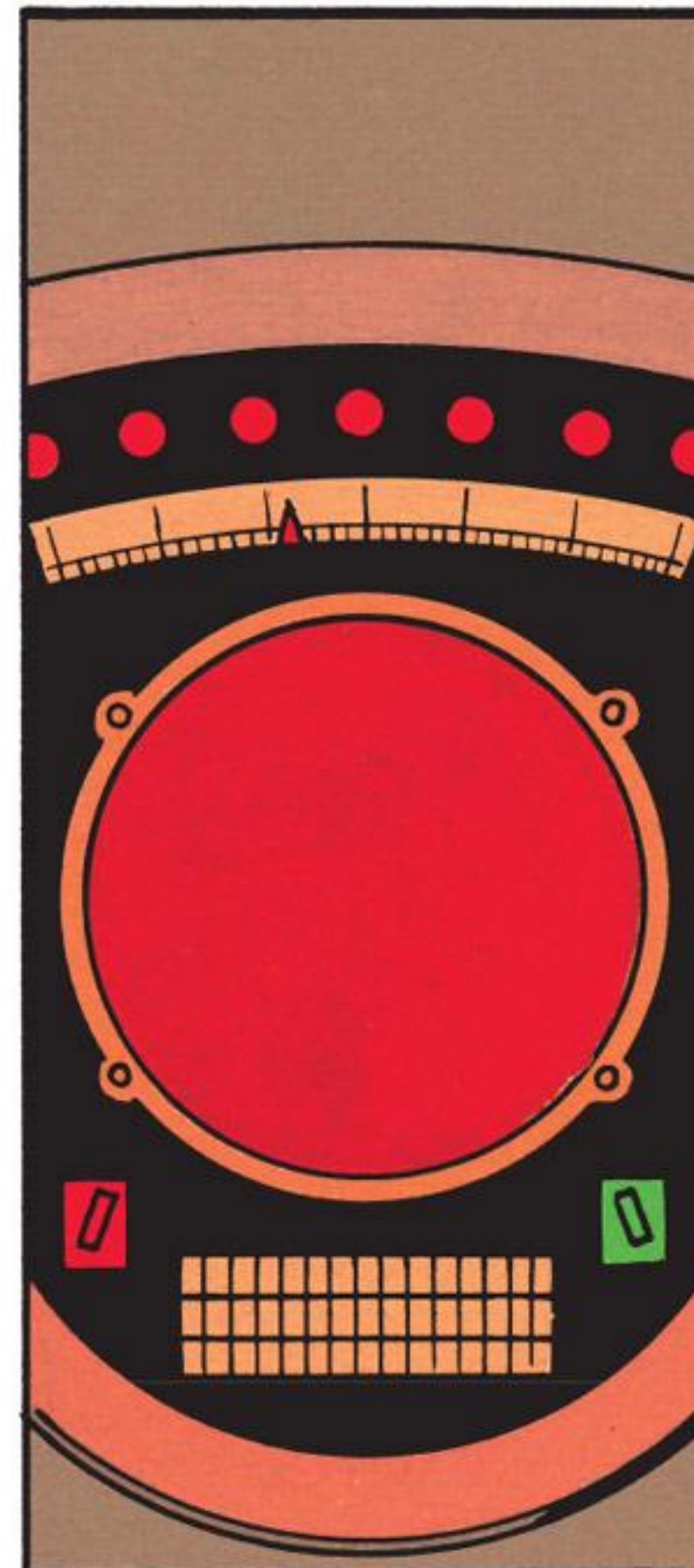
IMMEDIATELY THE CENTRAL SPECTROGRAPH AND EVERY INDICATOR BEGINS EMITTING BLINDING WHITE LIGHT, WHILE A LONG, SHRILL WHISTLING ASSAULTS HIS EARS...



THE PROFESSOR IS SEIZED BY UNSPEAKABLE FEAR AS, OVERWHELMED BY A TORRENT OF UNKNOWN SOUNDS AND DAZZLING FLASHES, HE HEARS THE TRIUMPHANT, MERCILESS VOICE OF MILOSH SCREAM.



MEANWHILE, THE CENTRAL SCREEN, GOING FROM YELLOW TO ORANGE, EVENTUALLY TURNS BRIGHT RED...



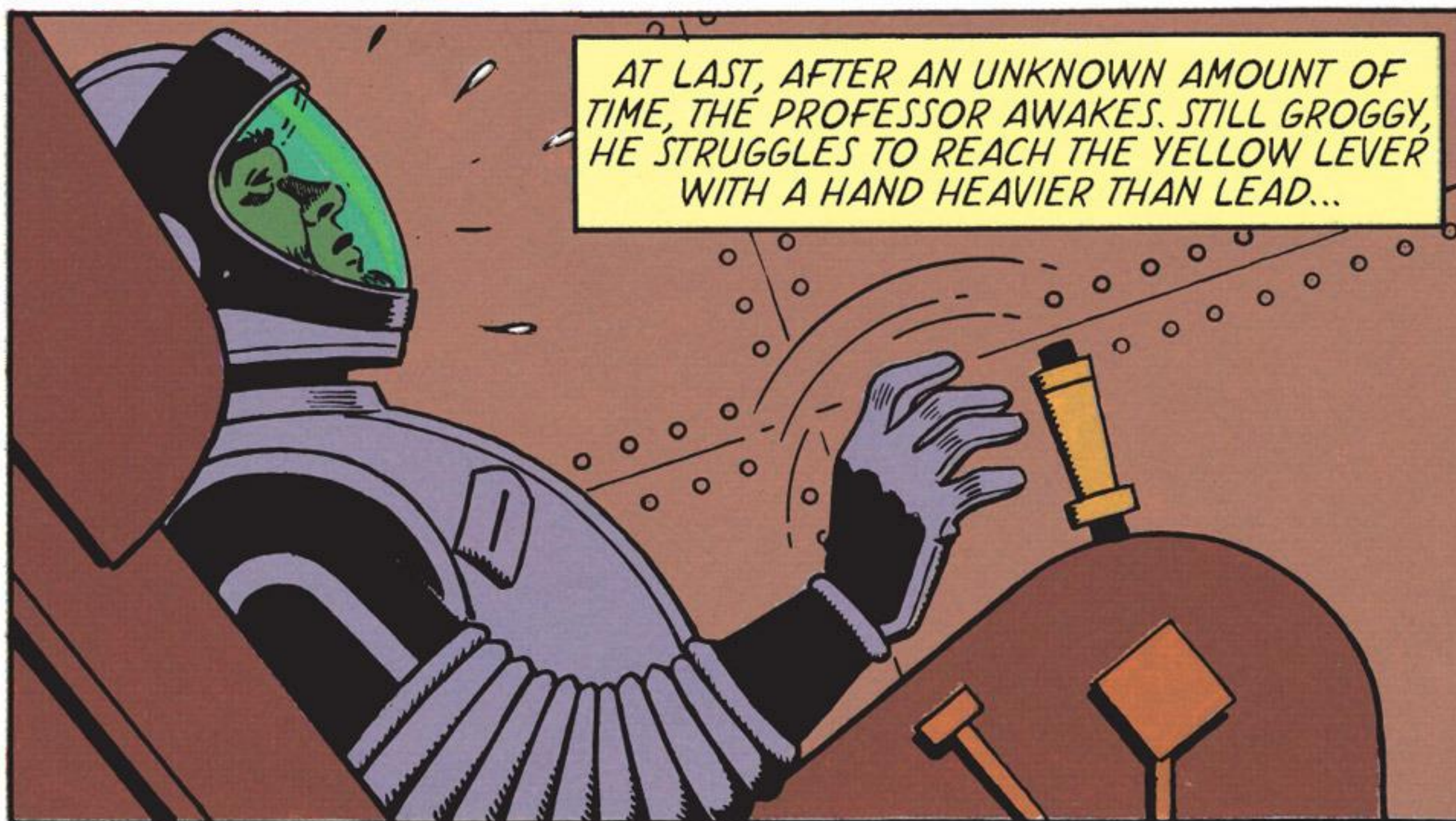
...THEN STARTS PASSING THROUGH THE PURPLE AND MAUVE SPECTRUM WHILE THE UNFORTUNATE MORTIMER FIGHTS WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH AGAINST THE TERRIBLE DROWSINESS THAT ENGULFS HIM...



INSIDE THE SPHERE NOW BATHED IN A STRANGE VIOLET GLOW, MORTIMER, HIS MIND FILLED WITH TERRIFYING VISIONS, HAS COLLAPSED ON HIS SEAT, UNMOVING...



...WHILE ON THE **TEMPORAL SELECTOR'S** COUNTER, NUMBERS GO BY IN AN INFERNAL DANCE...



AT LAST, AFTER AN UNKNOWN AMOUNT OF TIME, THE PROFESSOR AWAKES. STILL GROGGY, HE STRUGGLES TO REACH THE YELLOW LEVER WITH A HAND HEAVIER THAN LEAD...

...THEN, GRIPPING THE HANDLE AND SUMMONING ALL HIS STRENGTH, PULLS IT BACK FIERCELY...



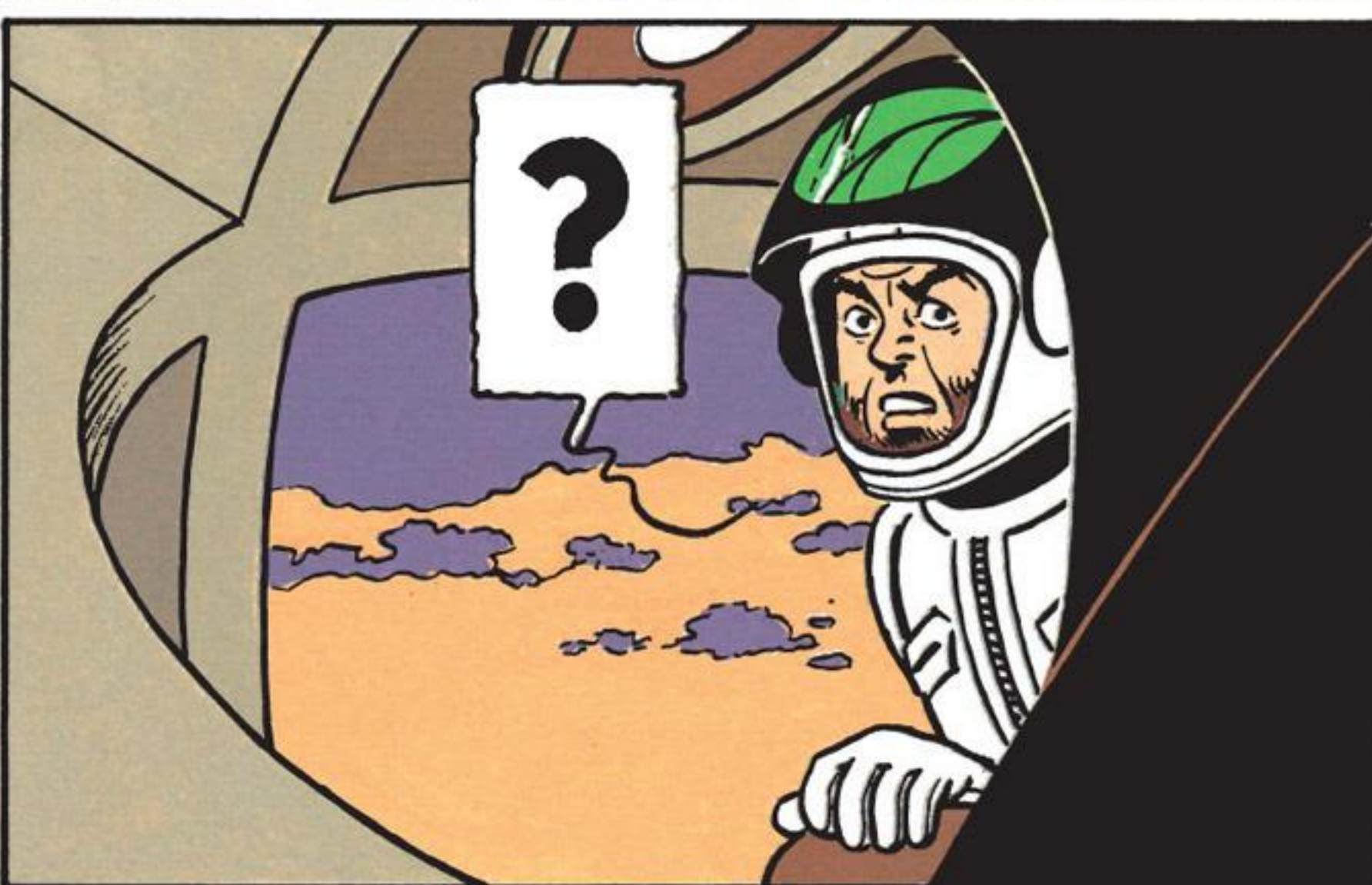
INSTANTANEOUSLY, JUST LIKE ON 'TAKE-OFF', AN UNBEARABLE WHISTLING RENDS THE AIR WHILE THE **CHRONOSCAPHE** SEEMS TO PERFORM A SERIES OF UNCOORDINATED LOOPS AMID A SPRAY OF BLINDING SPARKS...



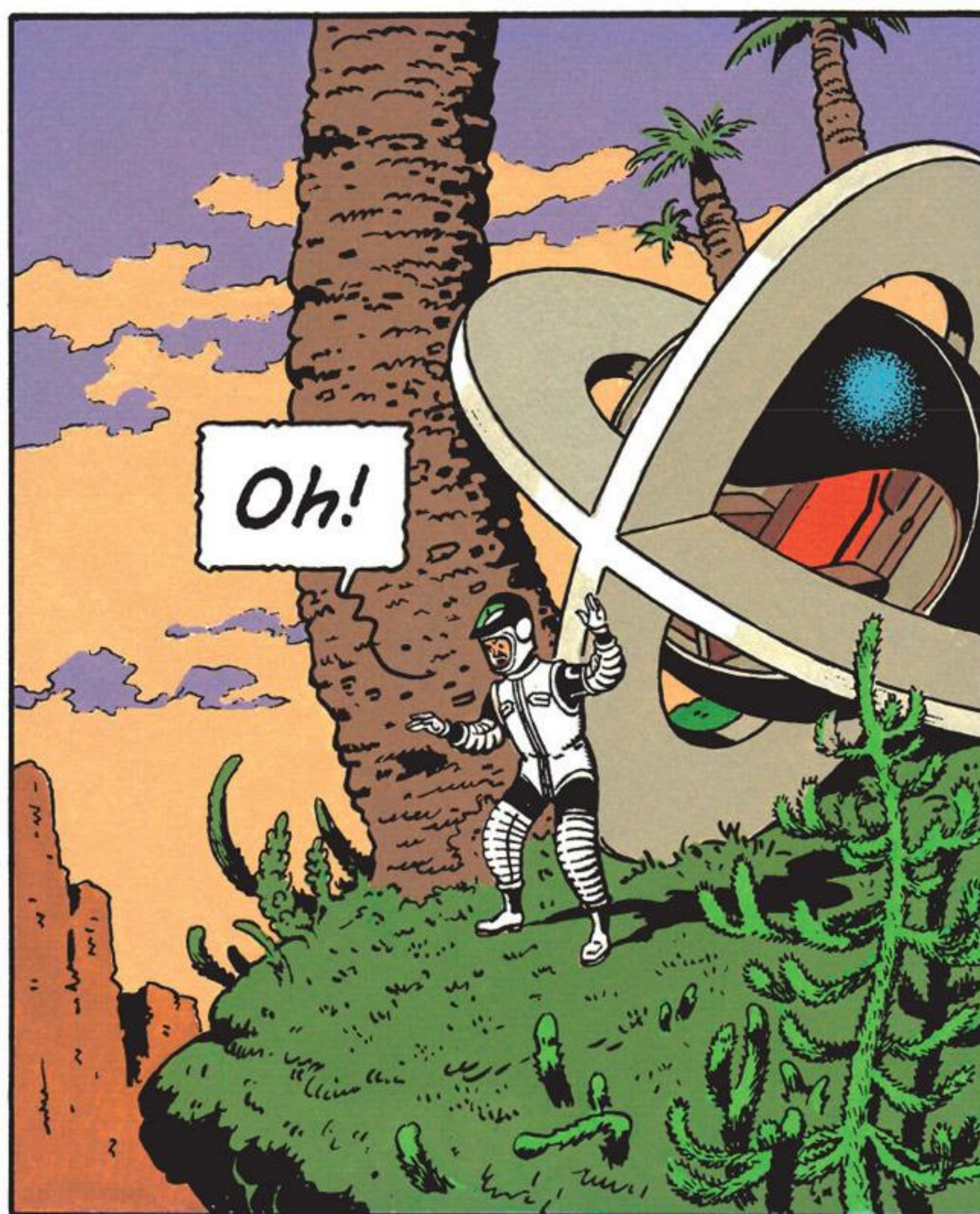
THEN SUDDENLY, WITHOUT WARNING, EVERYTHING STOPS... FOR A LONG TIME MORTIMER REMAINS MOTIONLESS IN HIS SEAT, TILTED AT A STRANGE ANGLE...



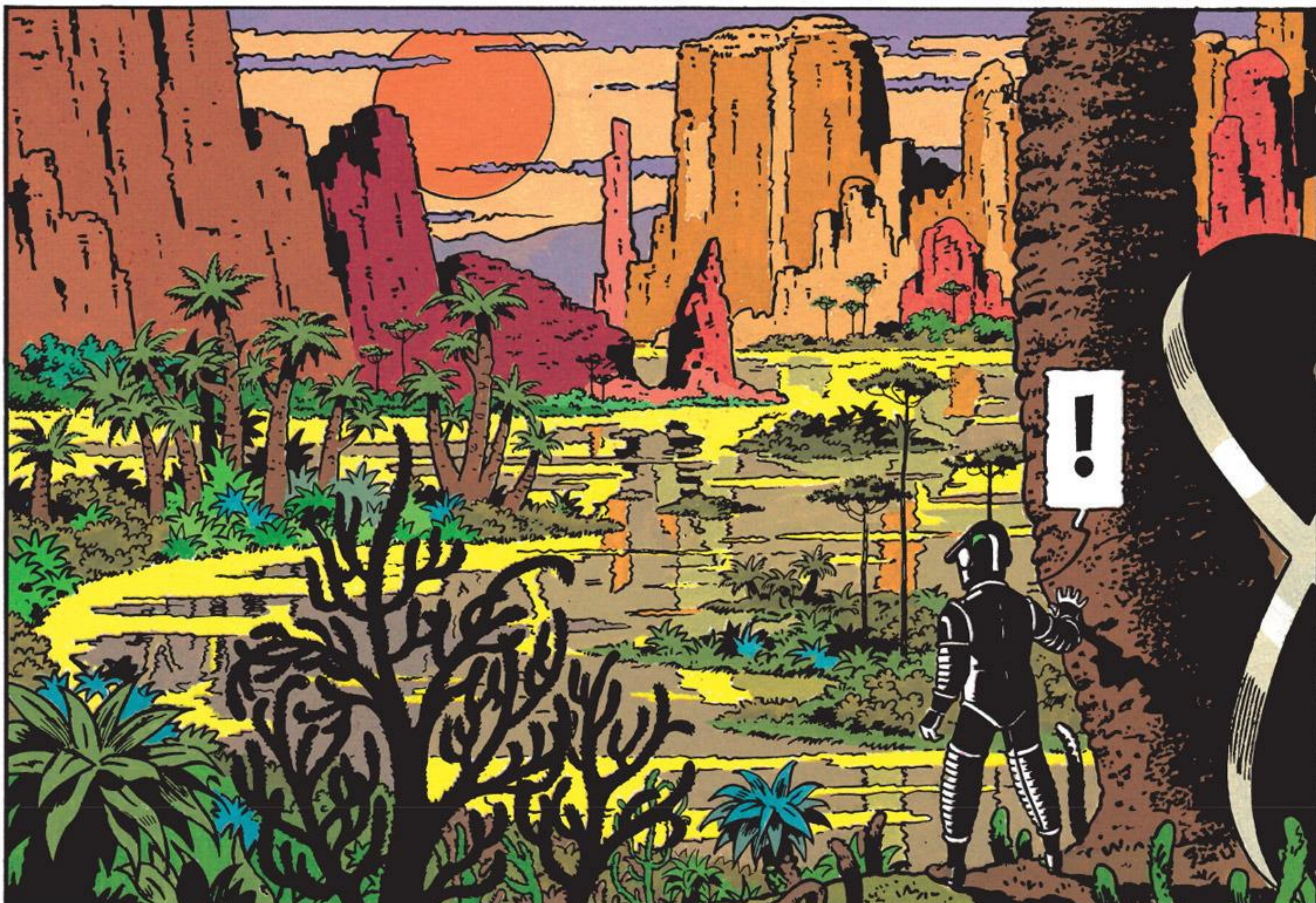
EVENTUALLY, LIKE A ROBOT, HE RAISES HIS VISOR ... UNBUCKLES ... AND OPENS THE COCKPIT, IMMEDIATELY FILLED BY A GUST OF DAMP, WARM AIR...



LEGS SHAKING, MORTIMER LOWERS HIMSELF TO THE GROUND - ONLY TO LET OUT A CRY OF FEAR!... RESTING LOPSIDED AGAINST A PROVIDENTIAL TREE, HIS VEHICLE IS DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO THE EDGE OF A CLIFF OVERLOOKING A VAST LAGOON, FROM WHOSE STAGNANT WATERS COMES A STRONG SMELL OF ROT AND HUMUS.



BEWILDERED, THE PROFESSOR GAZES AT THE STRANGE SCENERY THAT HAS REPLACED THE MEDIEVAL CRYPT...



AND AS HIS EYES COME TO REST ON THE TREE HE'S LEANING AGAINST, HE SUDDENLY CRIES OUT IN SURPRISE...

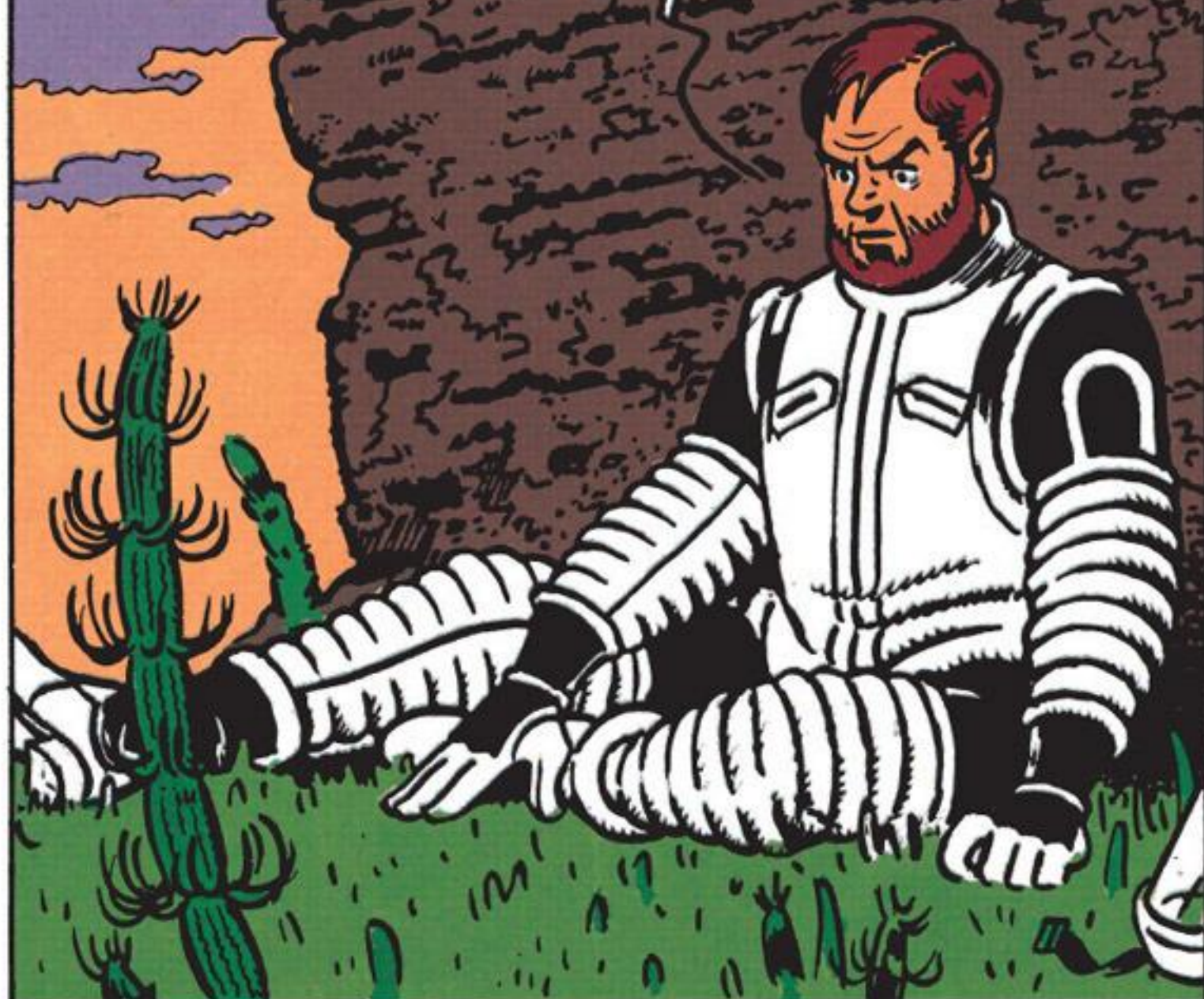


...It's... It's a *Williamsonia*! A plant that's been extinct for 150,000,000 years!!!



STUNNED BY THE TERRIBLE NEWS, MORTIMER HAS PLOPPED HIMSELF DOWN AT THE FOOT OF THE TREE...

No!... This isn't possible!... I now realise that I've never truly believed this invention could be real... Even at the moment of departure I still felt like I was in the middle of some farcical scientific mystification!...



...And yet here I am, back in the middle of prehistory... 100,000,000 years before man even appeared!!!!... And that machine I...

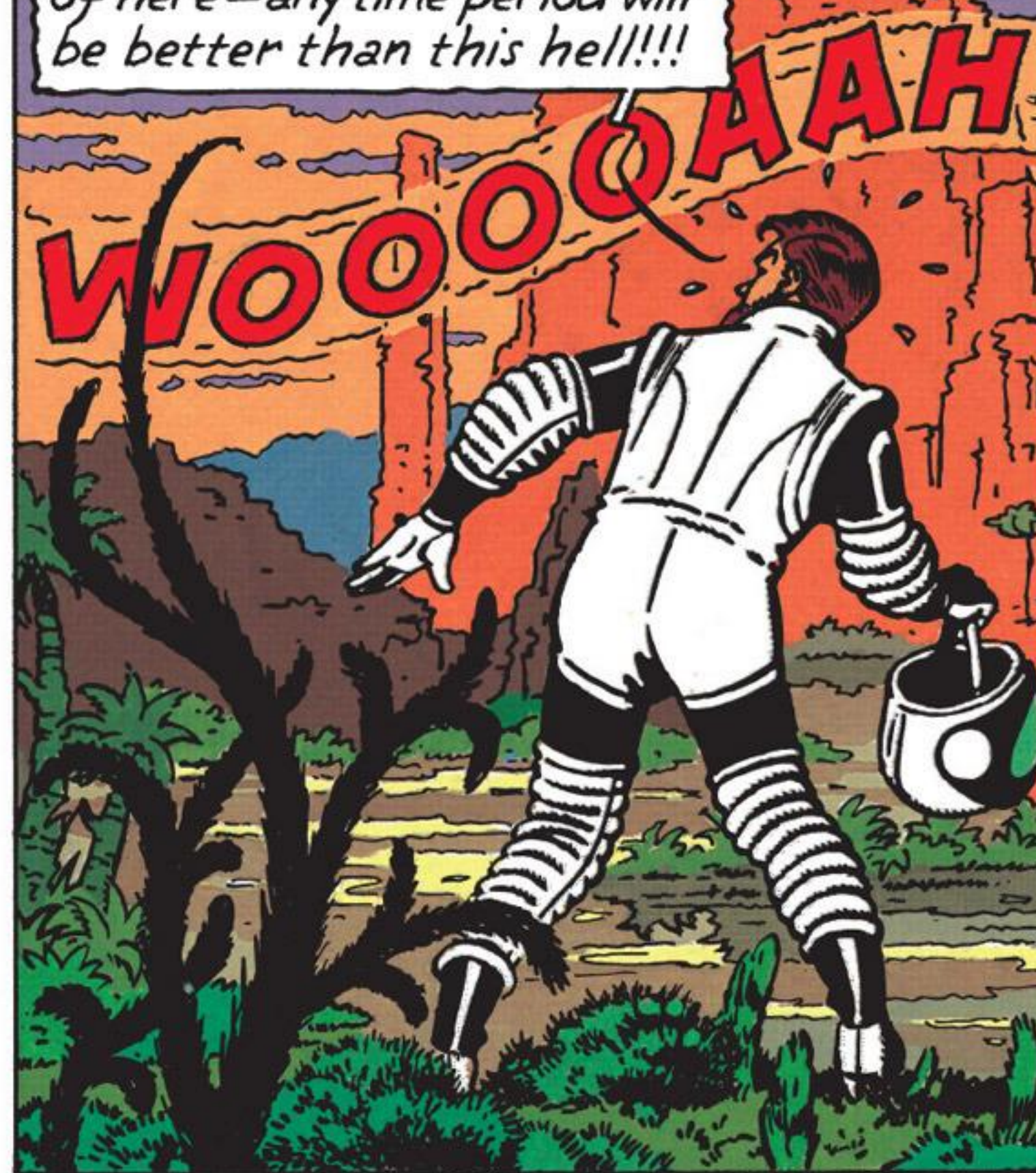
HE STOPS THEN, FOR IN A FLASH THE FULL HORROR OF THE DEVILISH TRAP DEvised BY MILOSH HAS FINALLY STRUCK HIM!!!

The fiend!!! So that's the vengeance he'd prepared for me: sabotage the Chronoscaphe to send me back into the mists of time with no hope of return!!!!...

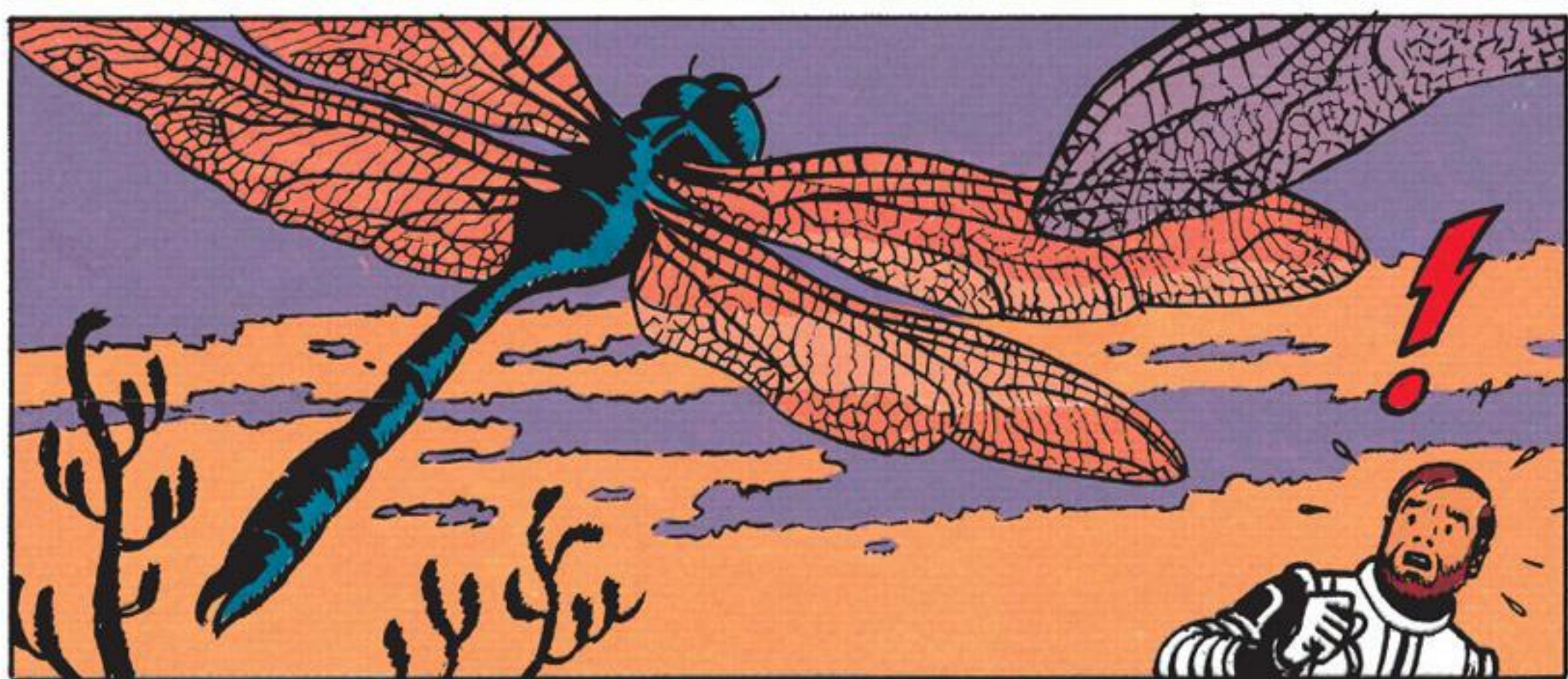


AND, AS IF TO CONFIRM THE SHOCKING INSIGHT, A LONG HOWL RISES FROM THE LAGOON...

Heavens above! Let's get out of here—any time period will be better than this hell!!!



AT THAT MOMENT, THOUGH, TWO MASSIVE **MEGANEURA** CHARGE AT HIM, WINGS HUMMING...



STANDING HIS GROUND, MORTIMER STARTS SWIPING AT THEM WITH HIS HELMET...



Shoo, you nasty creatures!!!

BUT THE BUCKLE OF THE CHINSTRAP CAN'T WITHSTAND THE STRESS... LIKE A STONE FROM A SLING, THE HELMET FLIES OFF AND FALLS FAR INTO THE SWAMP.



MUTTERING ANGRILY, MORTIMER HAS DASHED AFTER THE PRECIOUS HEADGEAR. SINKING DEEPER INTO THE MUDDY GROUND WITH EVERY STEP, THE PROFESSOR STRUGGLES TO CLEAR A PATH THROUGH THE DARK LABYRINTH OF TANGLED VINES AND PLANTS TEEMING WITH LIFE THAT COVER THE BANKS...



Damn and blast! I have to find it, though...

AT LAST, HE SEES HIS HELMET FLOATING A FEW FEET FROM THE BANK...

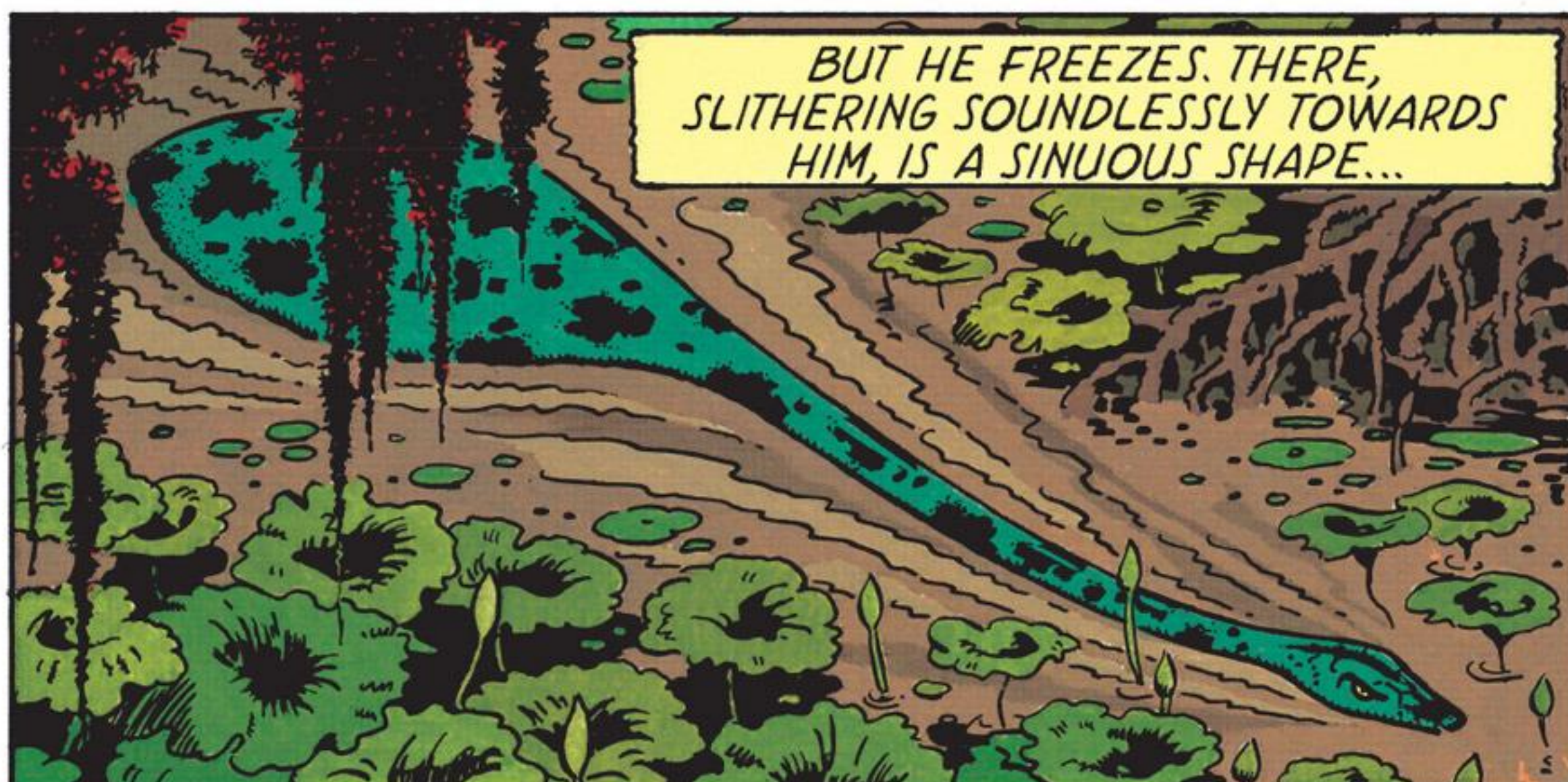


Finally!

...AND WITHOUT HESITATION FORGES AHEAD THROUGH THE MUDDY WATER.



Phew! I have it!



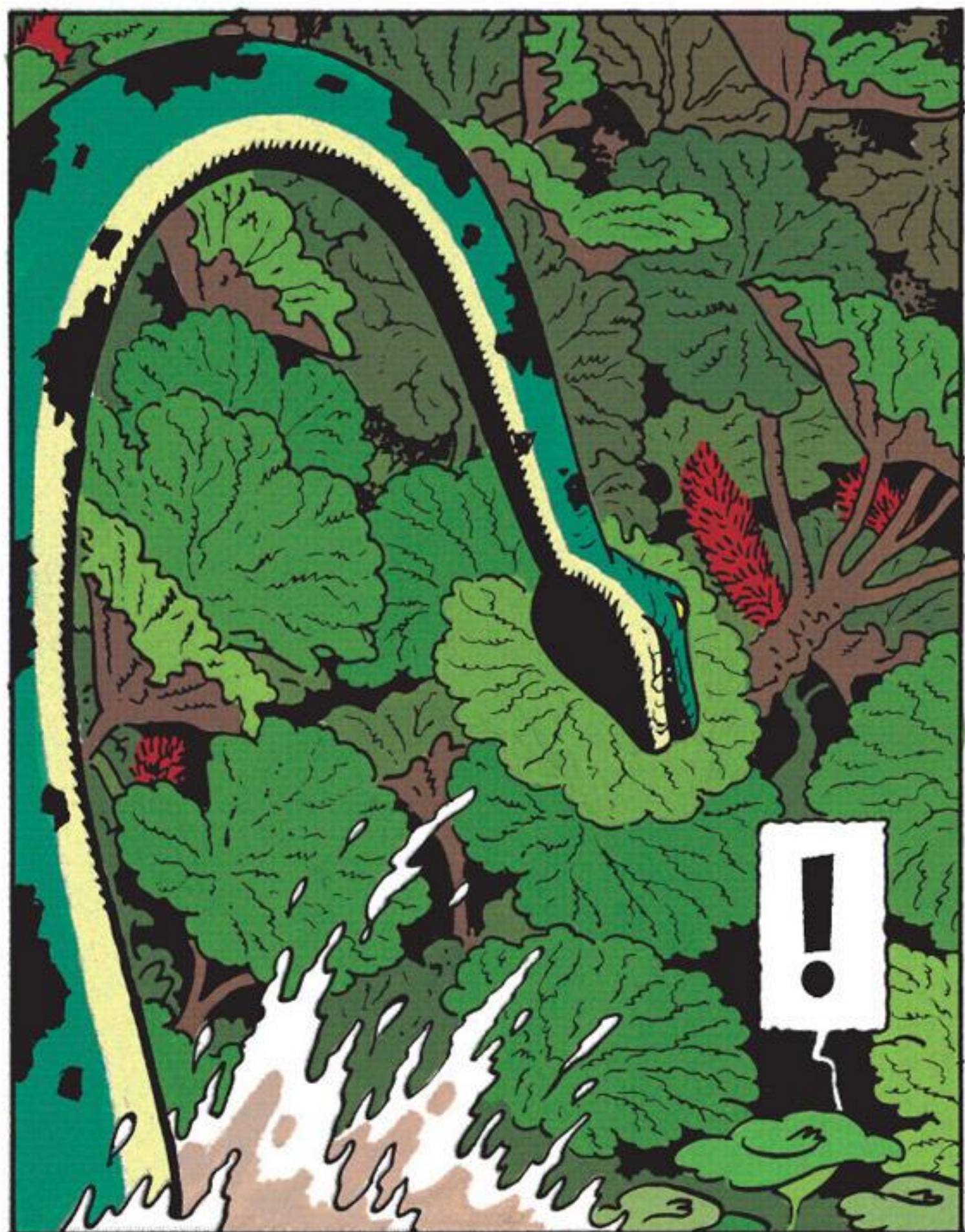
BUT HE FREEZES. THERE, SLITHERING SOUNDLESSLY TOWARDS HIM, IS A SINUOUS SHAPE...

...AND SUDDENLY, RISING TERRIFYINGLY 20 FEET ABOVE THE SURFACE, APPEARS THE REPTILIAN NECK OF AN **ELASMOSAURUS**!!!



Good Lord!

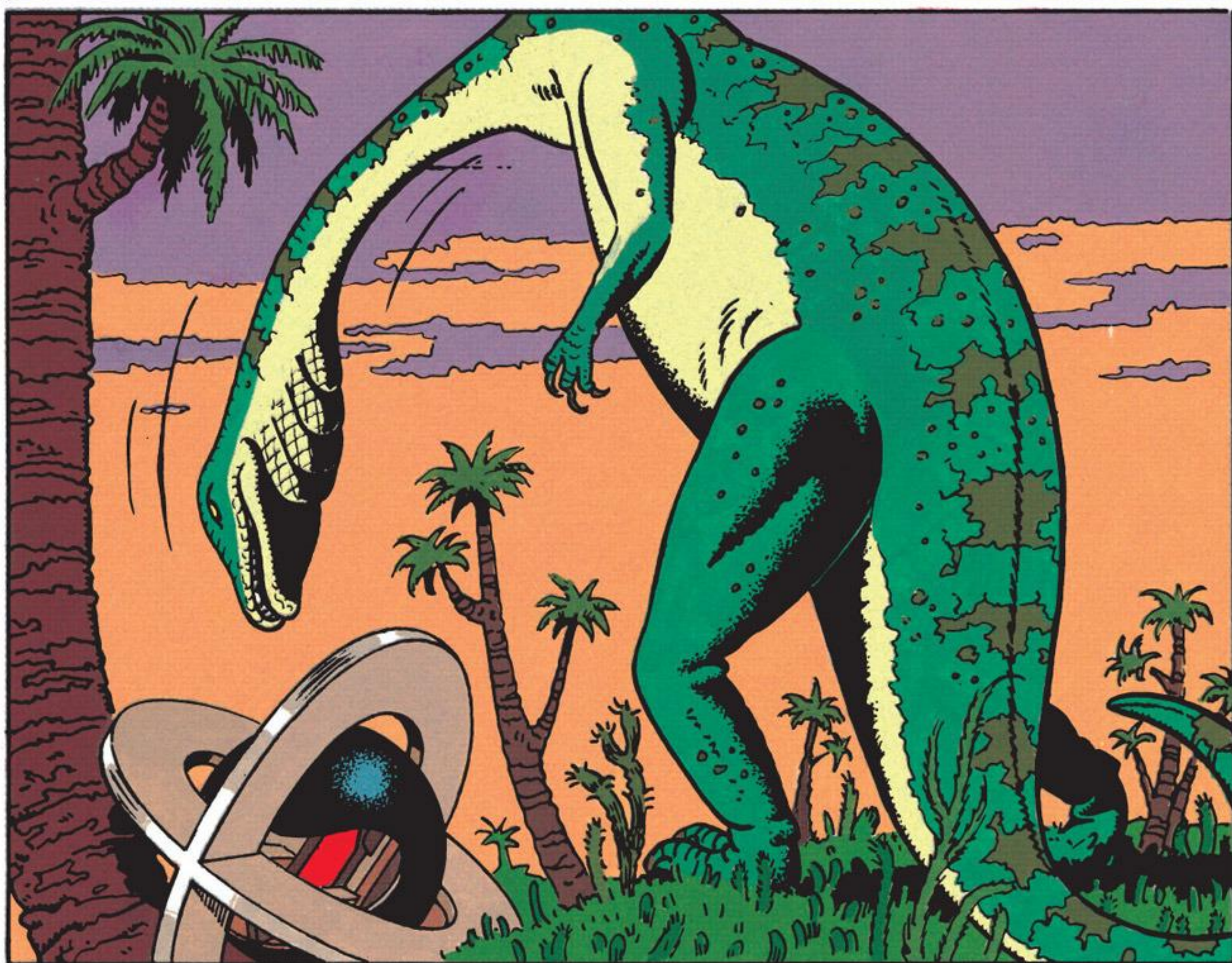
GRABBING HIS HELMET, MORTIMER HURRIEDLY DIVES BACK INTO THE PROTECTIVE TANGLE OF GIANT PLANTS – JUST AS THE MONSTER'S HEAD COMES STRAIGHT AT HIM!



OUR FRIEND THINKS HIMSELF SAFE, BUT AS HE COMES OUT OF THE JUNGLE, BREATHLESS, A GIGANTIC SHADOW PASSES OVER HIM...



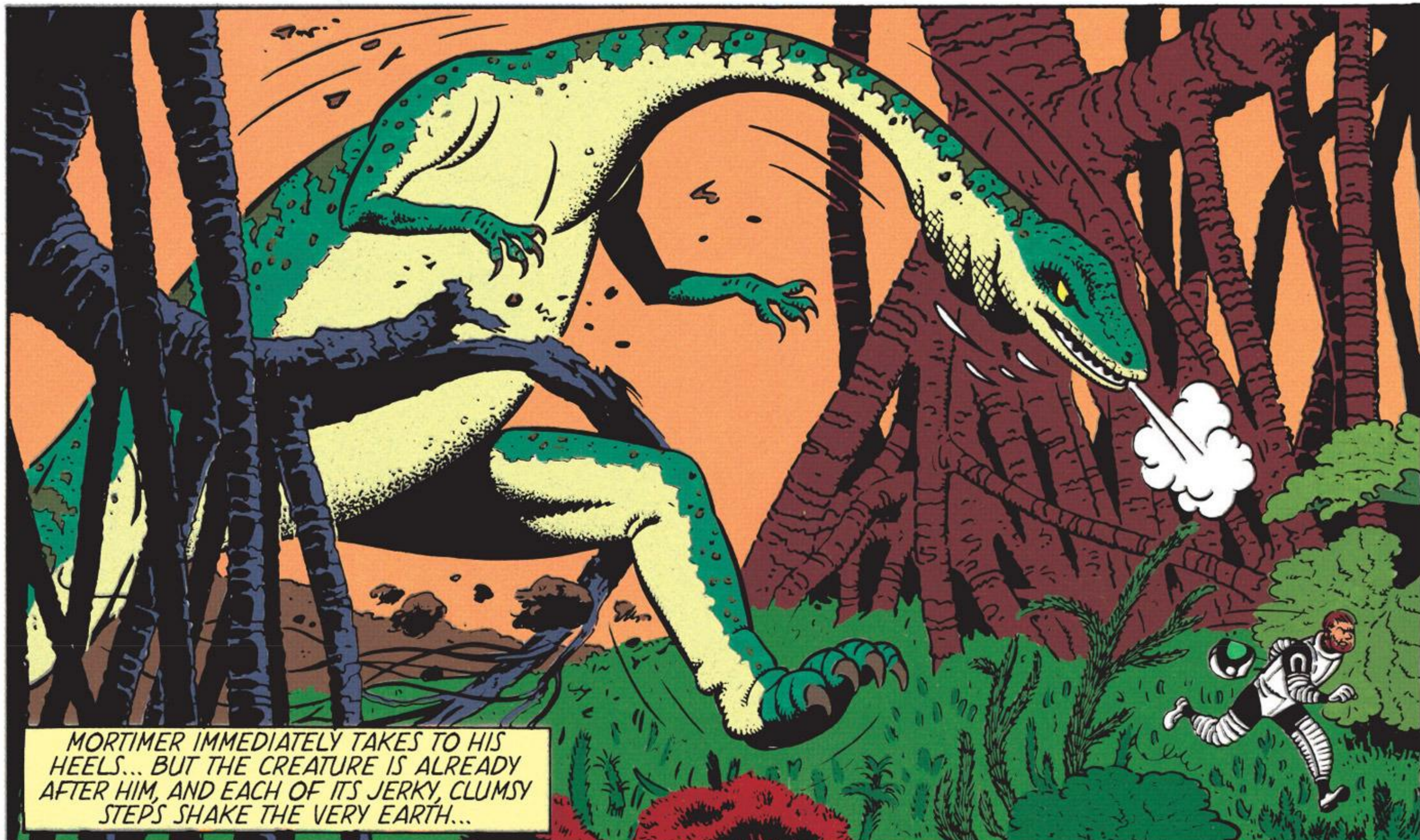
...LIFTING HIS HEAD, HE'S TERRIFIED TO SEE THAT THE MONSTROUS CREATURE THAT JUST STEPPED OVER HIM WITHOUT NOTICING HIS PRESENCE IS AN ENORMOUS PLATEOSAURUS. INTRIGUED BY THE CHRONOSCAPHE, THE DINOSAUR SNIFFS IT – AN INVESTIGATION THAT COULD CAUSE THE MACHINE TO FALL INTO THE SWAMP!...



THE UNFORTUNATE PROFESSOR CANNOT REFRAIN FROM CRYING OUT AT THE SIGHT...



SURPRISED, THE BEAST TURNS ITS HEAD AND DISCOVERS HIM...



THE FLEEING MAN DESPERATELY TRIES TO SEEK REFUGE IN THE SWAMP JUNGLE. ALREADY HE CAN FEEL THE BREATH OF HIS MASSIVE PURSUER ON HIS NECK WHEN...

...THE PROFESSOR DISAPPEARS INTO A DEEP CAVITY DUG BETWEEN THE ROOTS OF A DOWNED TREE...



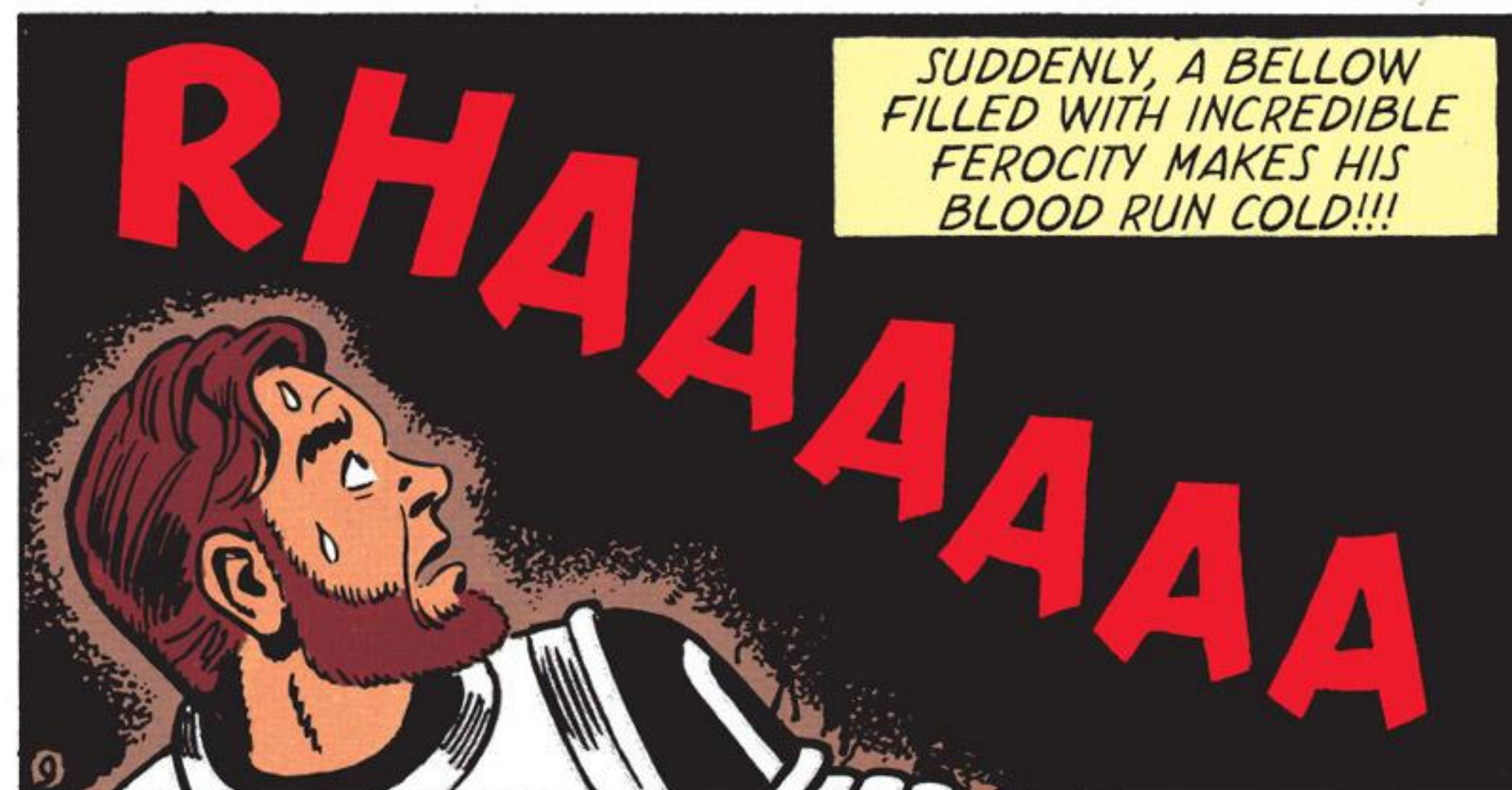
FURIOUS, THE **PLATEOSAURUS** TRIES TO PULL HIM OUT OF HIS MAKESHIFT REFUGE. BUT UNABLE TO REACH HIM, IT BEGINS TO LAY WASTE TO THE SURROUNDING GROUND...



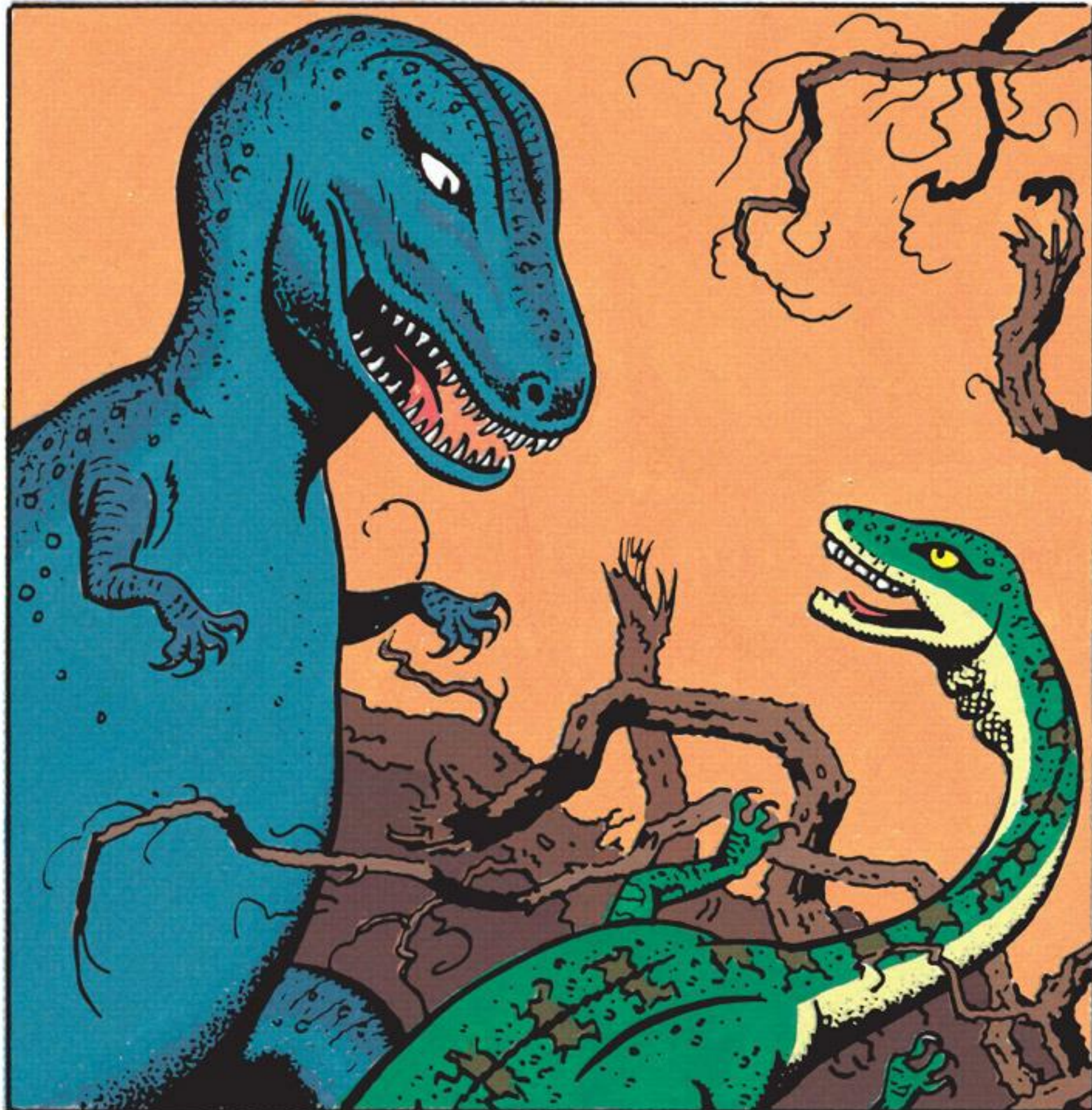
...CAUSING ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF EARTH TO FALL IN...



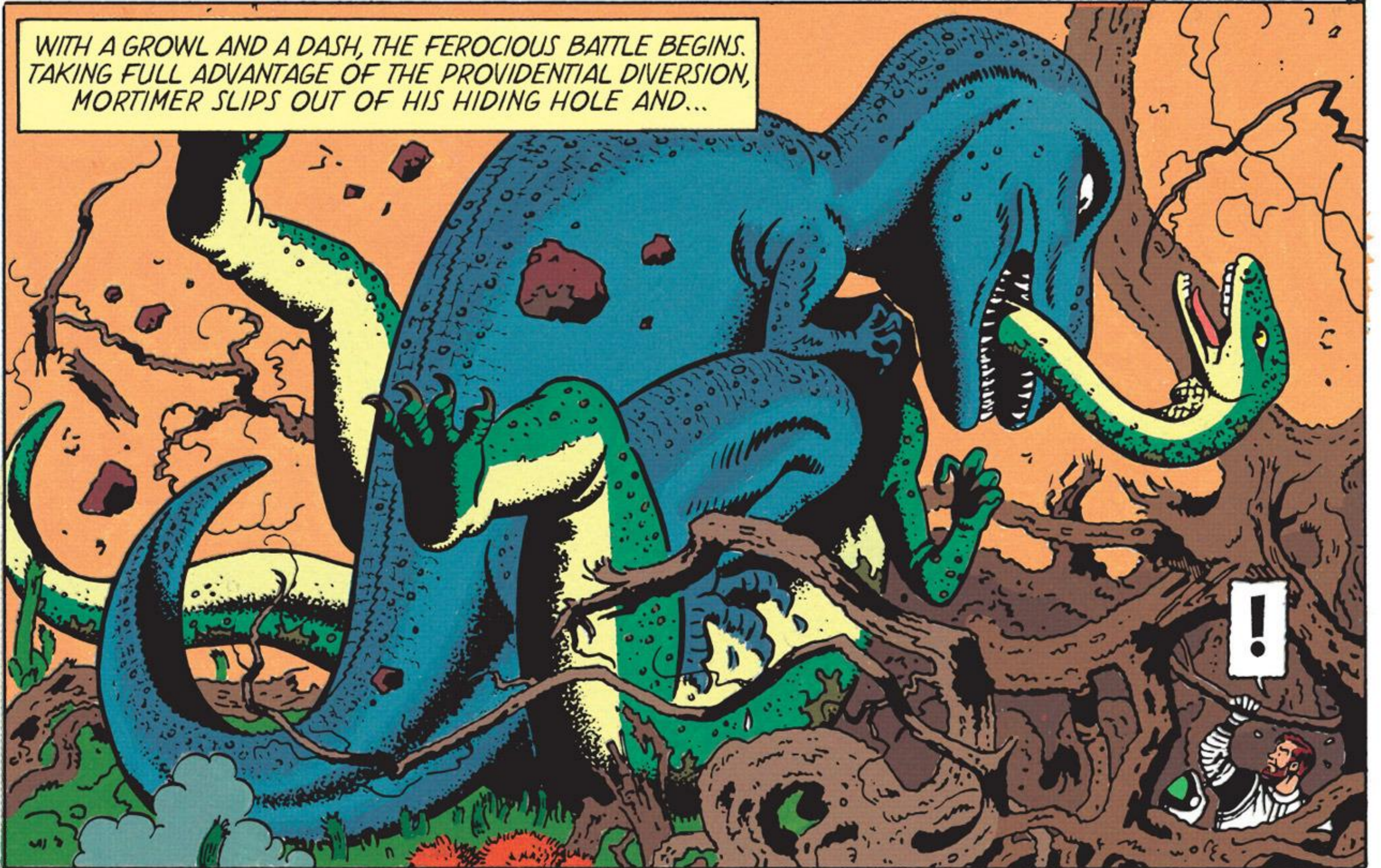
SUDDENLY, A BELLOW FILLED WITH INCREDIBLE FEROCITY MAKES HIS BLOOD RUN COLD!!!



IT'S A **TYRANNOSAURUS REX**, THE MOST TERRIFYING PREDATOR OF THE MESOZOIC ERA, COME TO FIGHT THE **PLATEOSAURUS** OVER ITS PREY.



WITH A GROWL AND A DASH, THE FEROCIOUS BATTLE BEGINS. TAKING FULL ADVANTAGE OF THE PROVIDENTIAL DIVERSION, MORTIMER SLIPS OUT OF HIS HIDING HOLE AND...



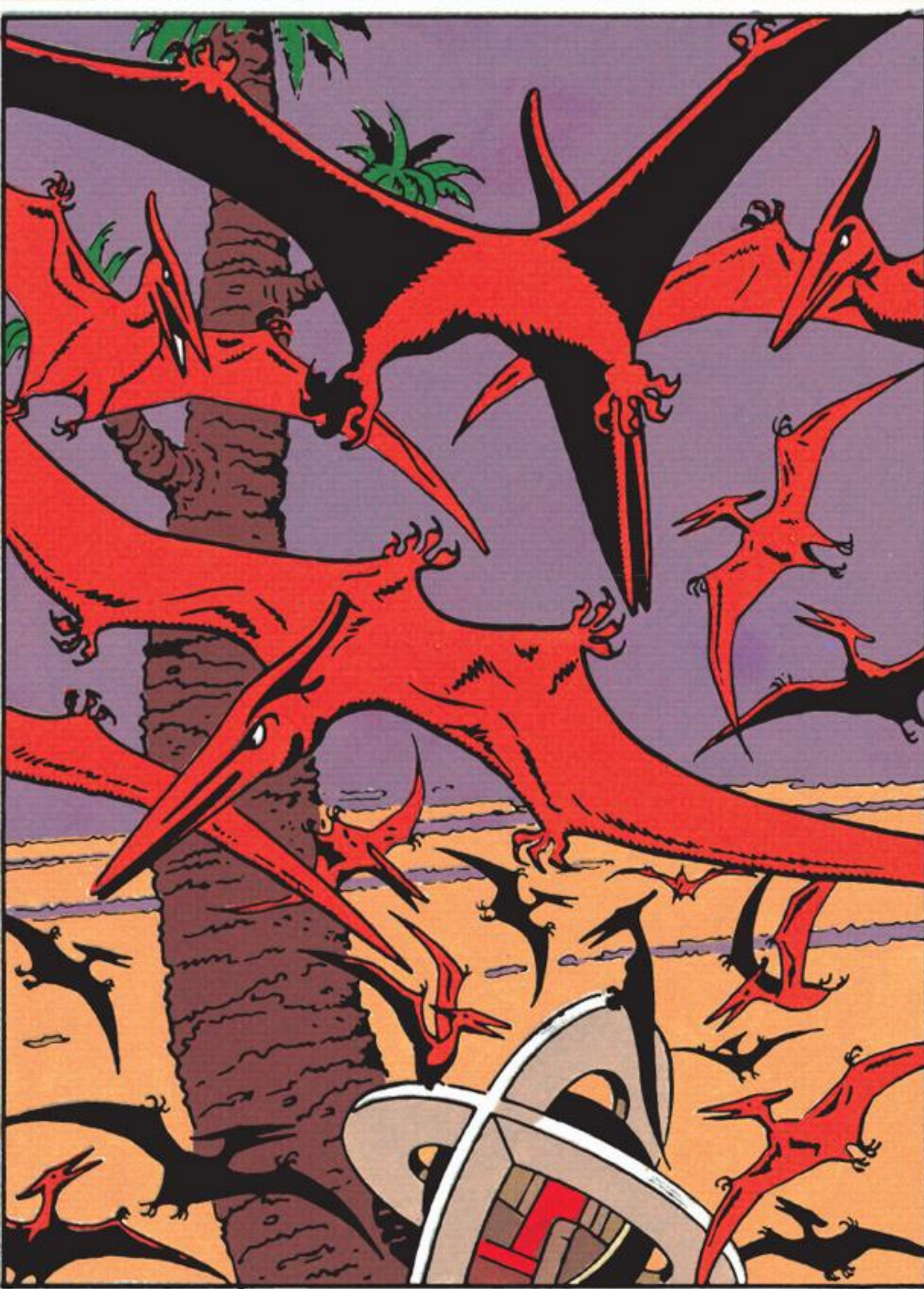
...SPRINTS TOWARDS THE MACHINE, HIS ONLY LINK WITH THE MODERN WORLD...



BUT AS HE COMES WITHIN SIGHT OF THE CHRONOSCAPHE, A NEW SHOCK AWAITS HIM...



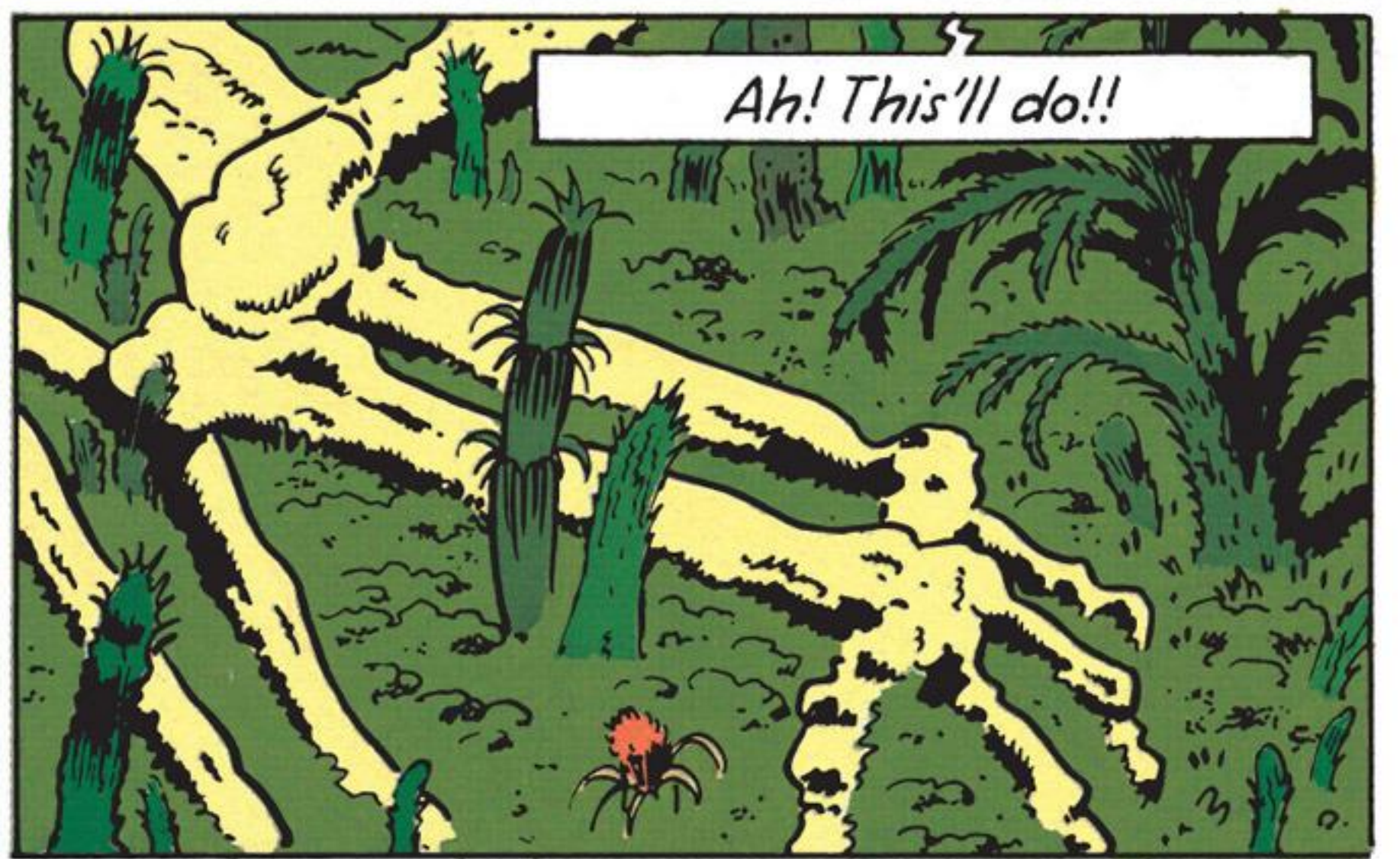
IN A CACOPHONY OF DISCORDANT CRIES, A COLONY OF **PTEROSAURS** IS ATTACKING THE TIME MACHINE, RAINING BLOWS ON IT WITH THEIR BEAKS!



Blast them! They'll wreck it!... How can I drive them away?! I left my pistol inside the cockpit!... And...



BUT MORTIMER'S EYE IS CAUGHT BY BONES STICKING OUT OF THE MUD - THE REMAINS OF SOME OTHER MONSTER...



HE GRABS A LARGE BONE, PUTS ON HIS HELMET AND, WHIRLING HIS IMPROVISED CLUB ABOVE HIS HEAD, DARINGLY CHARGES THE MASSIVE BIRD-LIKE THINGS!...



...TEMPORARILY SCARED AWAY BY THIS STRANGE OPPONENT, THEY SCATTER WILDLY.



MORTIMER WASTES NO TIME JUMPING INTO THE MACHINE AND CLOSING THE SPHERE...



AND HE QUICKLY PULLS ON THE RED LEVER, JUST AS THE PTEROSAURS ONCE AGAIN ATTACK IN FORCE!



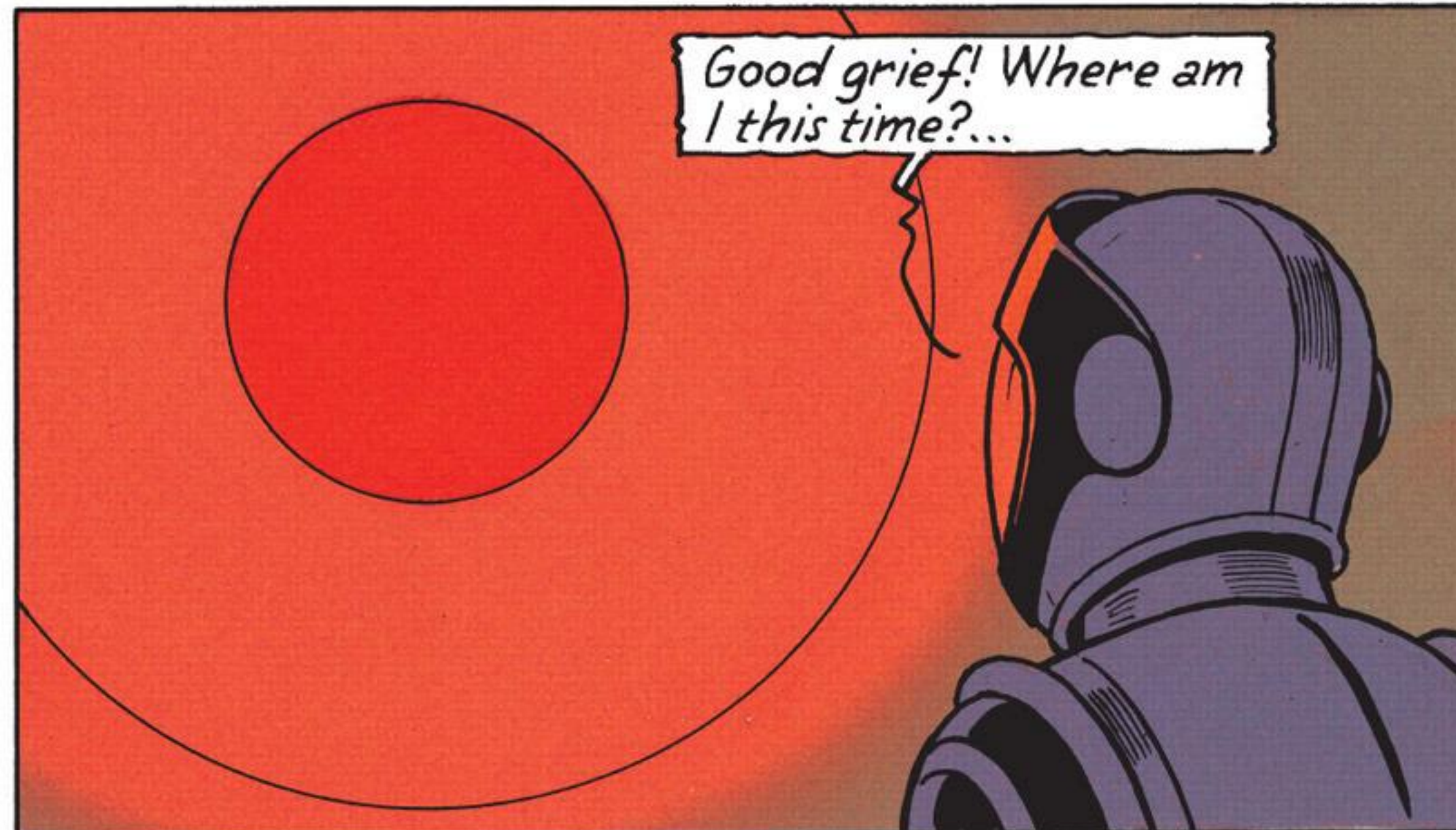
INSTANTLY MORTIMER FINDS HIMSELF BACK IN THE MIND-BENDING ATMOSPHERE OF HIS FIRST TRIP...



...WHILE ON THE COUNTER, DATES ONCE AGAIN FLY BY AT BREAKNECK PACE.



WHEN AT LAST THE PROFESSOR OVERCOMES HIS DIZZINESS AND REGAINS CONTROL OF HIS SENSES, THE CENTRAL SPECTROGRAPH IS EMITTING A BRIGHT RED LIGHT.



Good grief! Where am I this time?...

MORTIMER DOES HIS BEST TO FOCUS.

Obviously, if the selector was sabotaged, there's no point in trying to return to the exact moment I departed. I'll just try to return to the 20th century, then work it out from there.



FROWNING, MORTIMER EXAMINES THE CONTROL PANEL.

...Let's see - how can I calculate my position?... The spectrograph's colour variations must have something to do with it ... but what?... Only one thing for it: trial and error. Let's go!!!



AND HE CONFIDENTLY PULLS THE YELLOW LEVER, BRINGING THE MACHINE TO A BRUTAL STOP! AS THE HORRIBLE WHISTLING FILLS THE AIR, THE VEHICLE SLAMS INTO THE GROUND SO HARD THAT MORTIMER IS STUNNED FOR A WHILE...



FINALLY, HIS HEART RACING, HE OPENS THE SPHERE AND...

Thank heavens - the crypt!!!!... But it's very dark!...

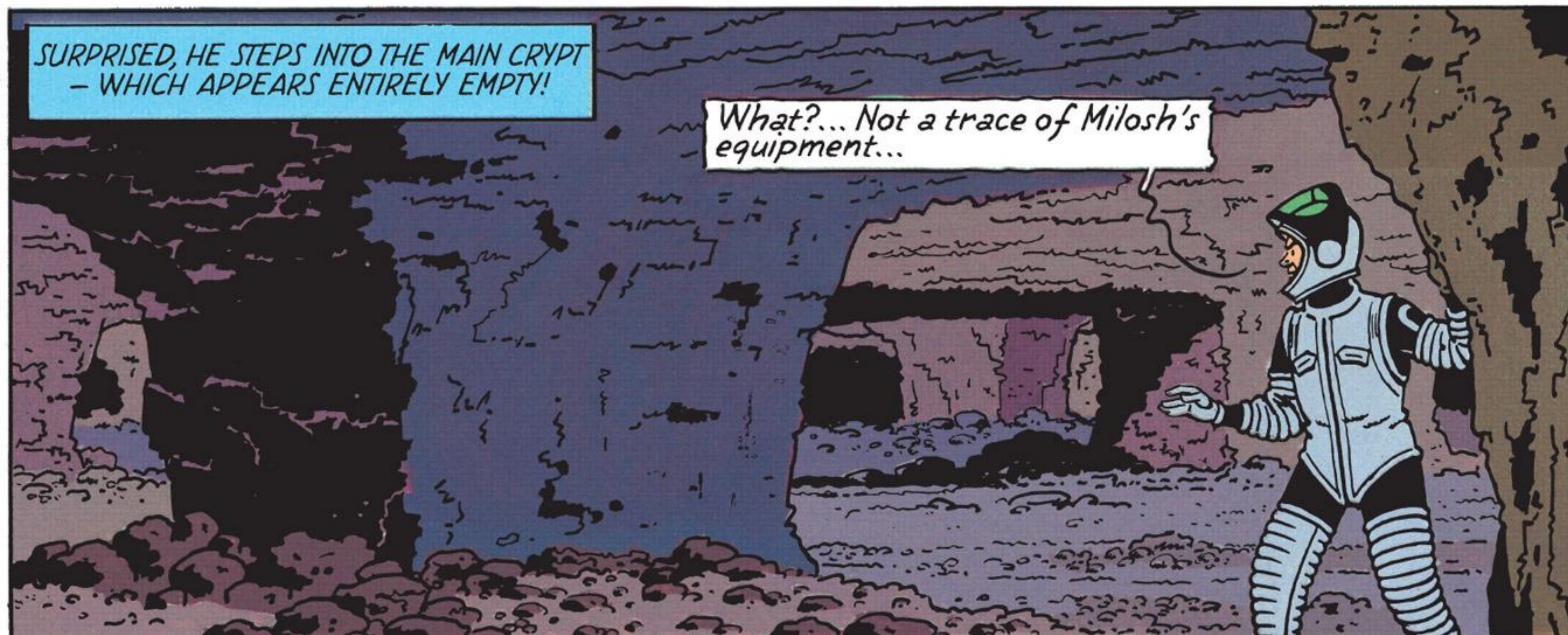


THE PROFESSOR JUMPS OUT...

Oh?... The platform is gone... That explains the impact on arrival!



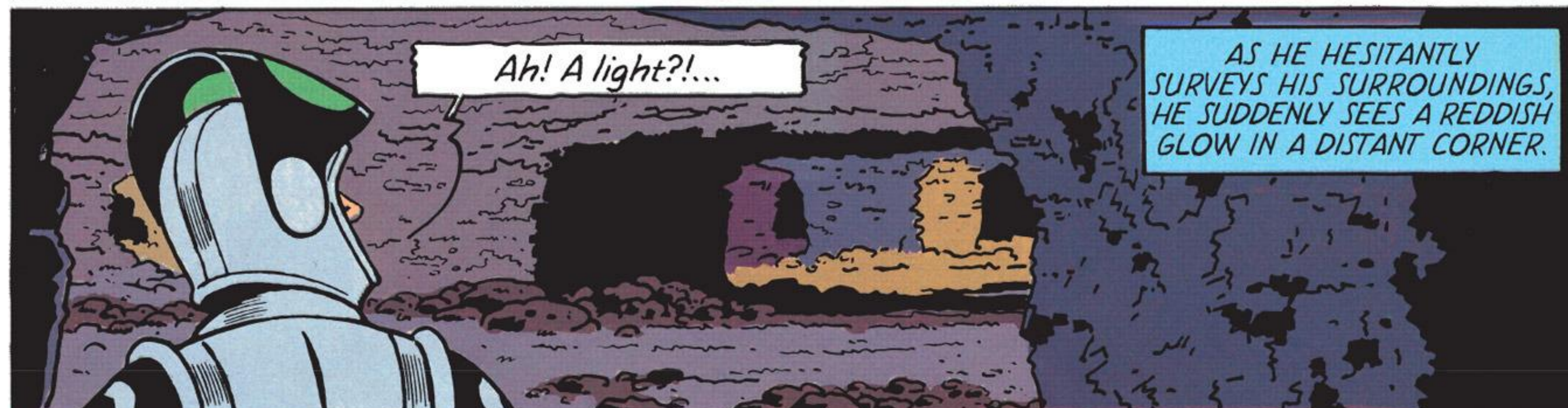
SURPRISED, HE STEPS INTO THE MAIN CRYPT - WHICH APPEARS ENTIRELY EMPTY!



What?... Not a trace of Milosh's equipment...

Ah! A light?!...

AS HE HESITANTLY SURVEYS HIS SURROUNDINGS, HE SUDDENLY SEES A REDDISH GLOW IN A DISTANT CORNER.

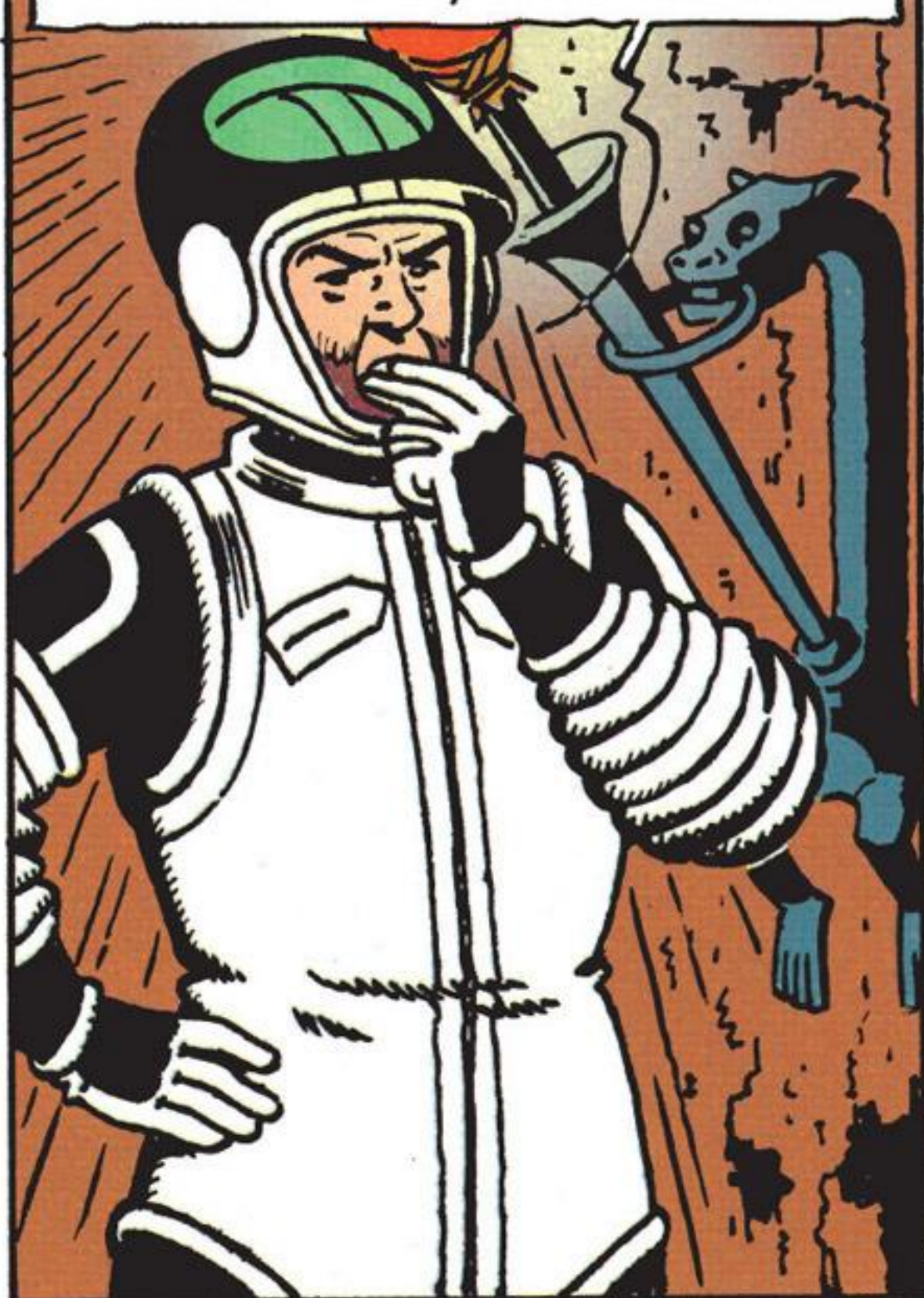


AND AFTER CAREFULLY MAKING HIS WAY IN THAT DIRECTION, HE'S ASTONISHED TO FIND A TORCH HELD TO THE WALL, ITS DANCING FLAME ILLUMINATING THE BOTTOM STEPS OF A NARROW STAIRCASE...



THE PROFESSOR IS PERPLEXED...

I'll need to know what time period this is if I intend to calibrate that blasted machine!... Time to go and have a look up there!



AND SO, GRABBING THE TORCH, HE RESOLUTELY BEGINS TO WALK UP THE STAIRS...

What more could happen at this point, anyway?!...



THE CLIMB IS EXHAUSTING AS THE SEEMINGLY ENDLESS STAIRS ASCEND THROUGH THE VERY ROCK...

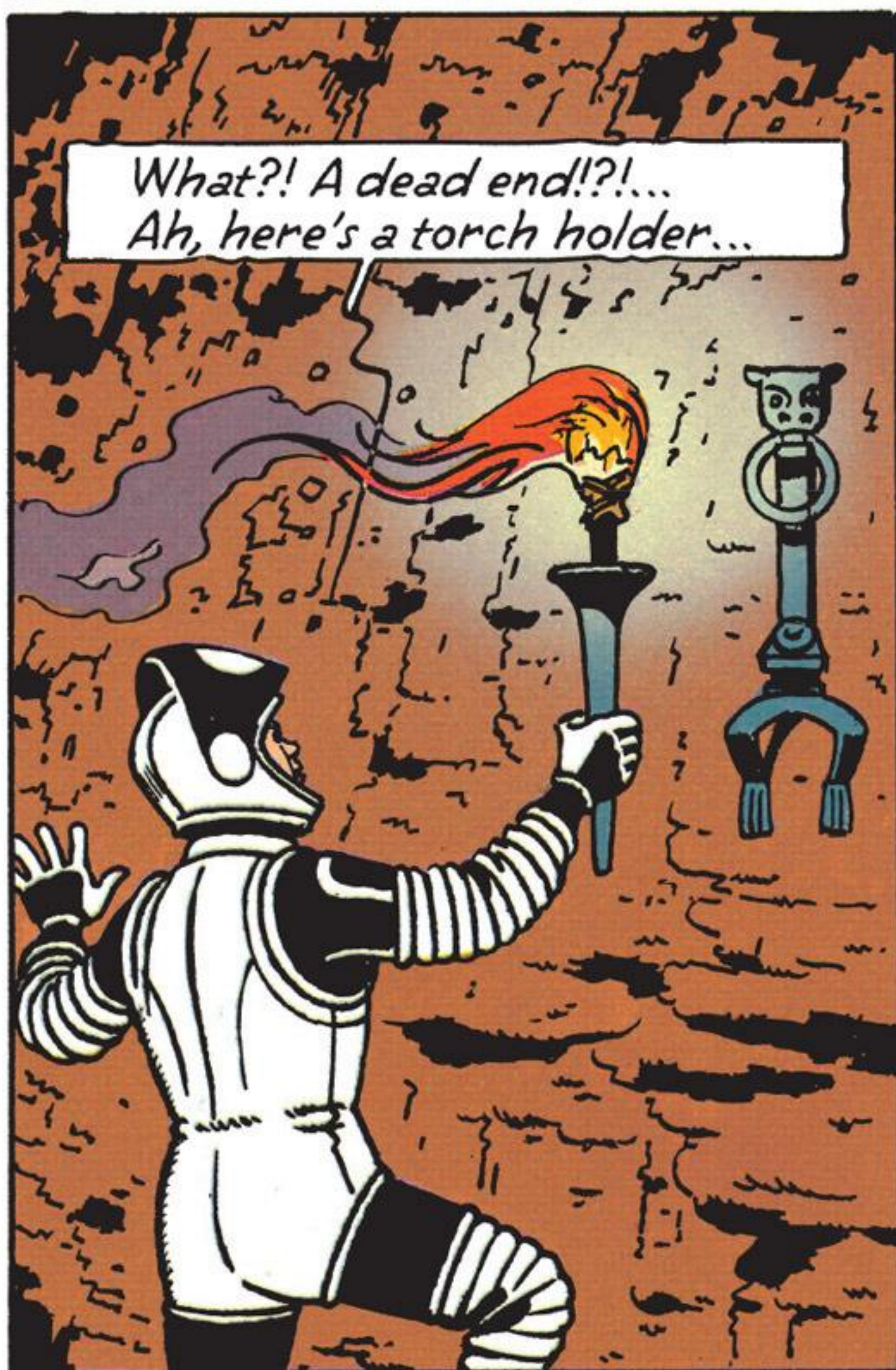


Oh dear... I feel dizzy... Where the devil is this taking me?...



SUDDENLY, THOUGH, MORTIMER IS FACING A WALL.

What?! A dead end?!... Ah, here's a torch holder...



HIS TORCH NOW SECURED TO THE WALL, MORTIMER BEGINS TO METHODICALLY RUN HIS HANDS OVER THE WALL.

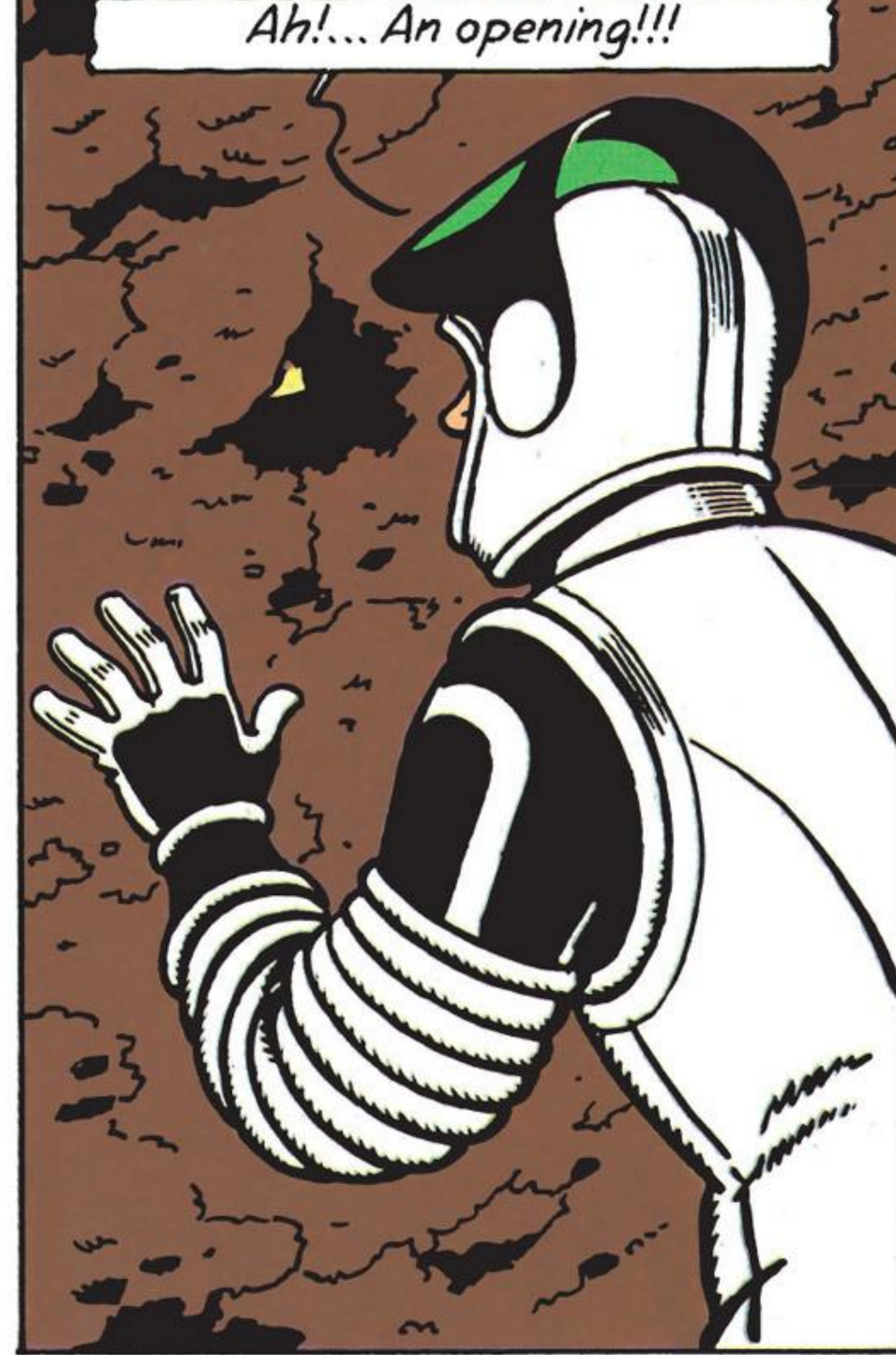
It must be a secret passage... The mechanism must be hidden somewh...



BUT HE FREEZES, HAVING HEARD THE FAINTEST MURMUR OF VOICES...



Ah!... An opening!!!



AND THROUGH THE TINY HOLE PIERCING THE ROCK, MORTIMER IS STUNNED TO DISCOVER A SCENE WHOSE CHARACTERS SEEM TO COME STRAIGHT OUT OF A 14TH-CENTURY MINIATURE!!!

Good Sir Gui, in the name of our Holy Mother, have mercy on these children...

Never!... These thieves will be hanged!!

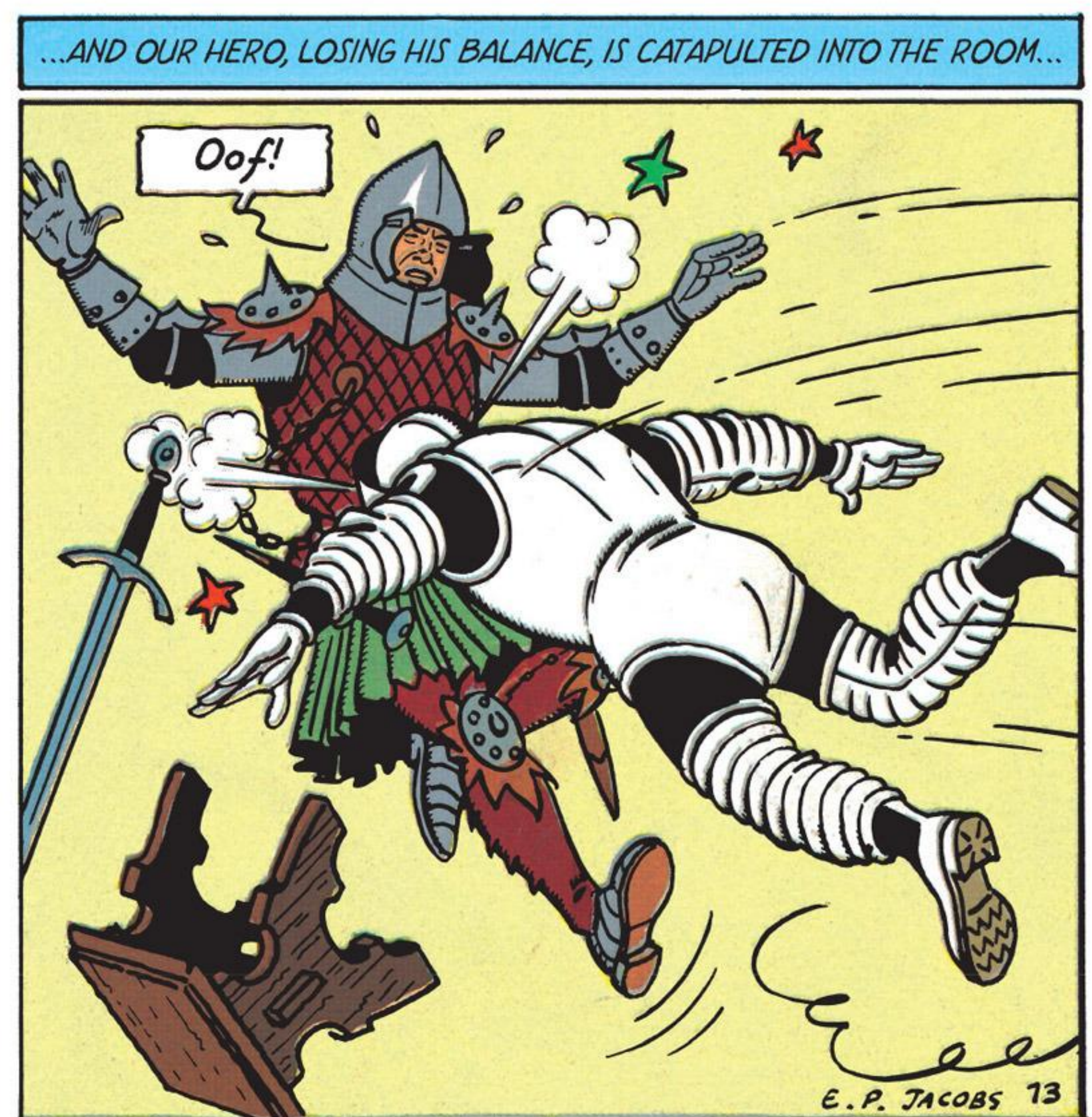
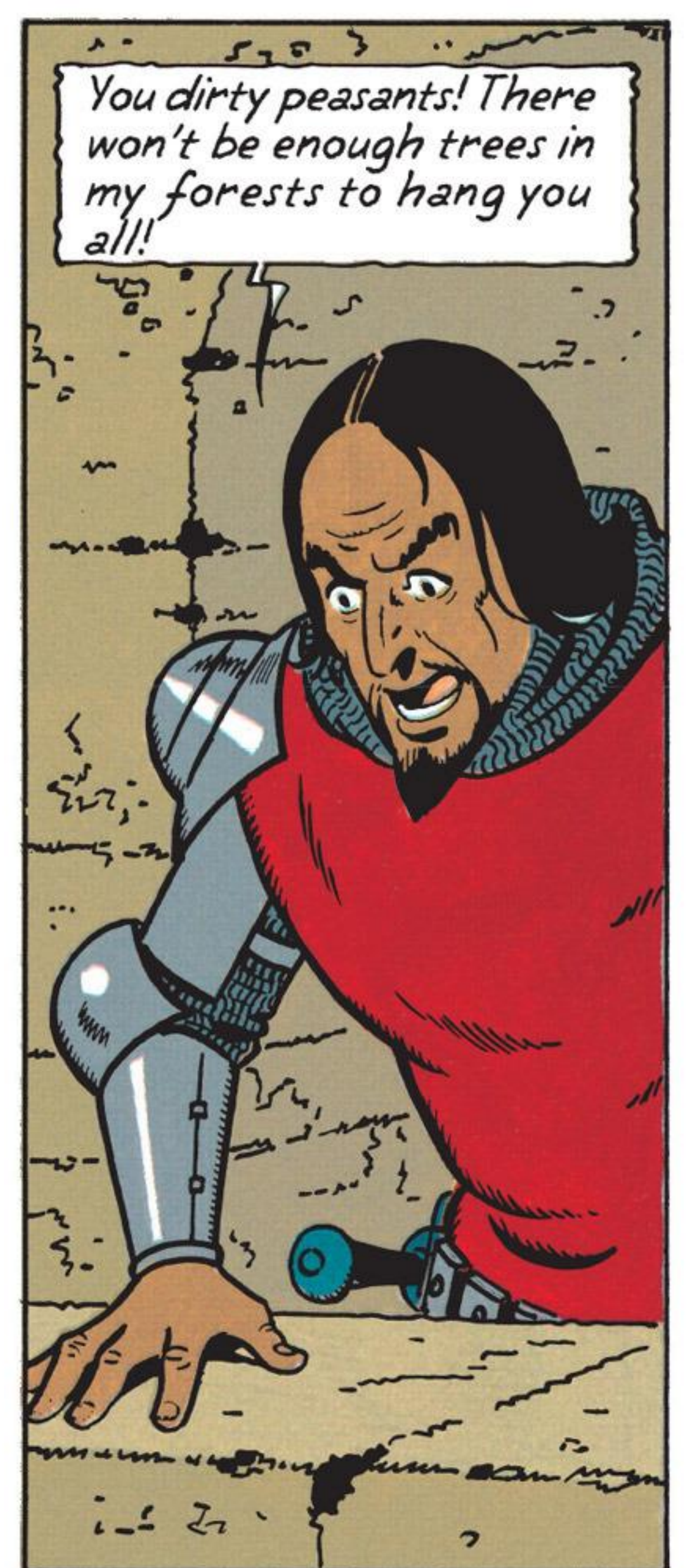
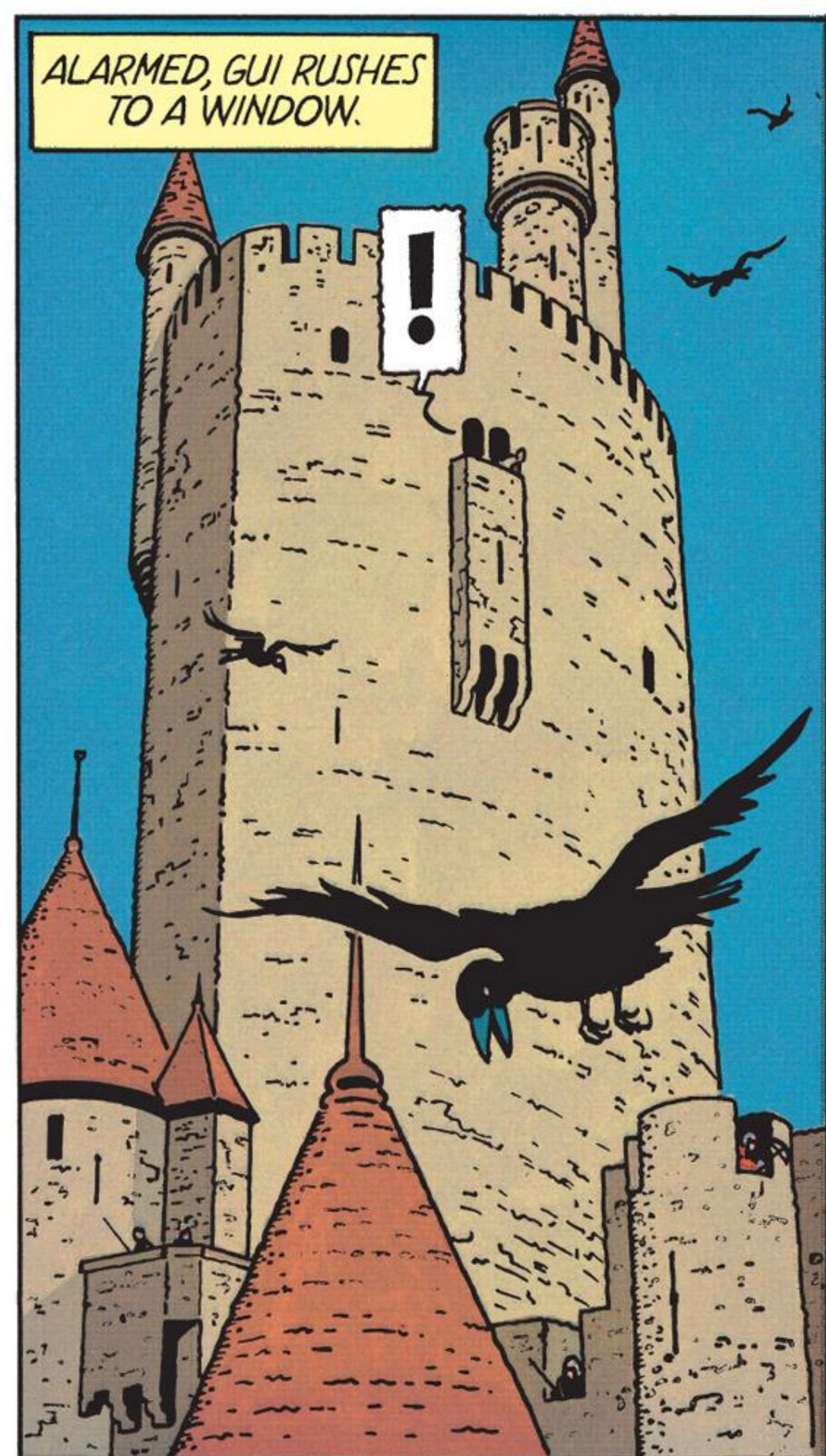


My Lord! Hang them, for poaching two hares on your lands?...

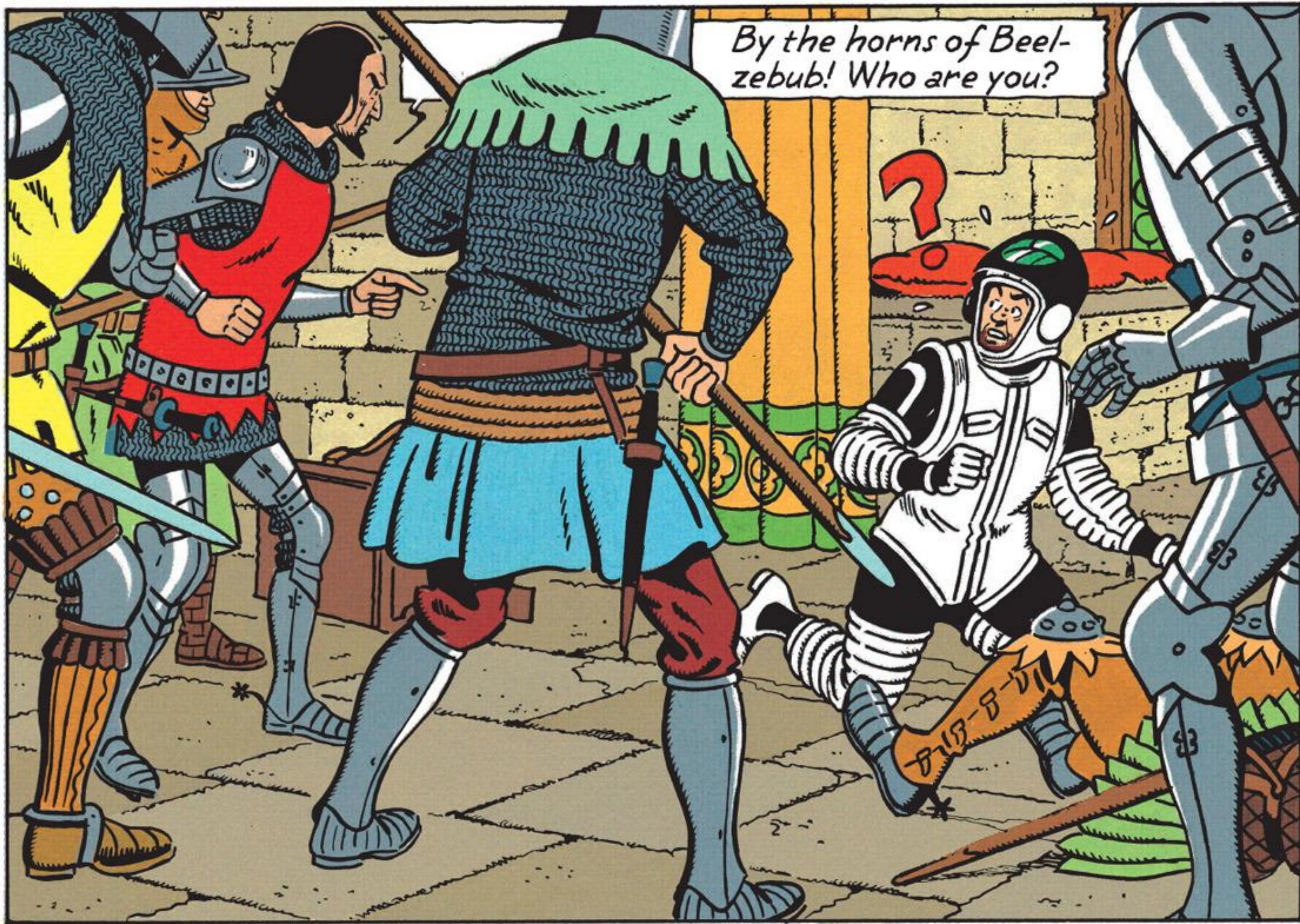


Ha! How dare you, my own chaplain, stand up for these commoners – even as their fellows are outside our walls shouting in rebellion!?... Enough of this – let justice be done!





FOR AN INSTANT, THE PROFESSOR'S SENSATIONAL ENTRANCE HAS THE ONLOOKERS FROZEN IN PLACE! BUT THE BARON SOON RECOVERS...



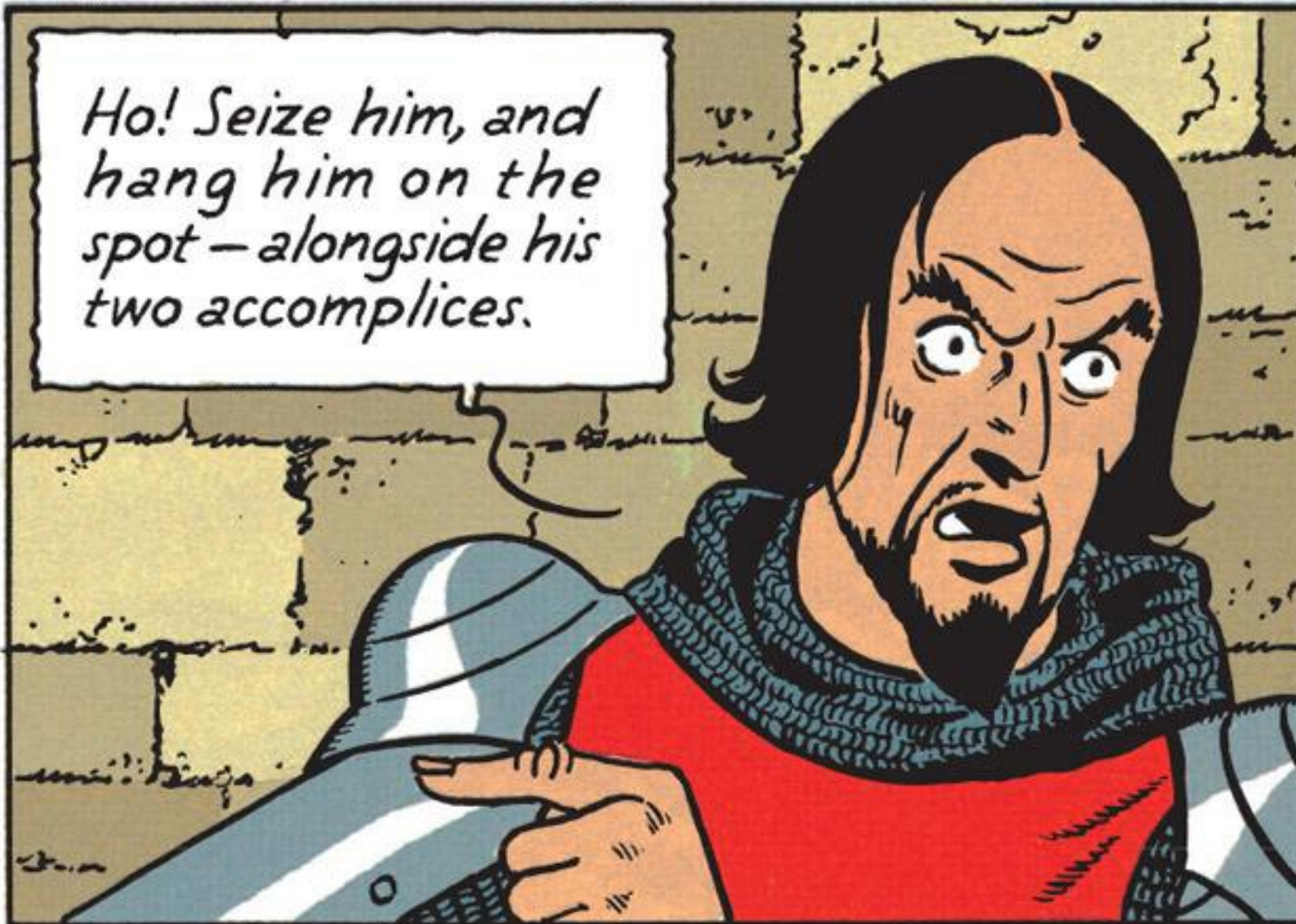
DAZED, OUR FRIEND ANSWERS WITHOUT THINKING...



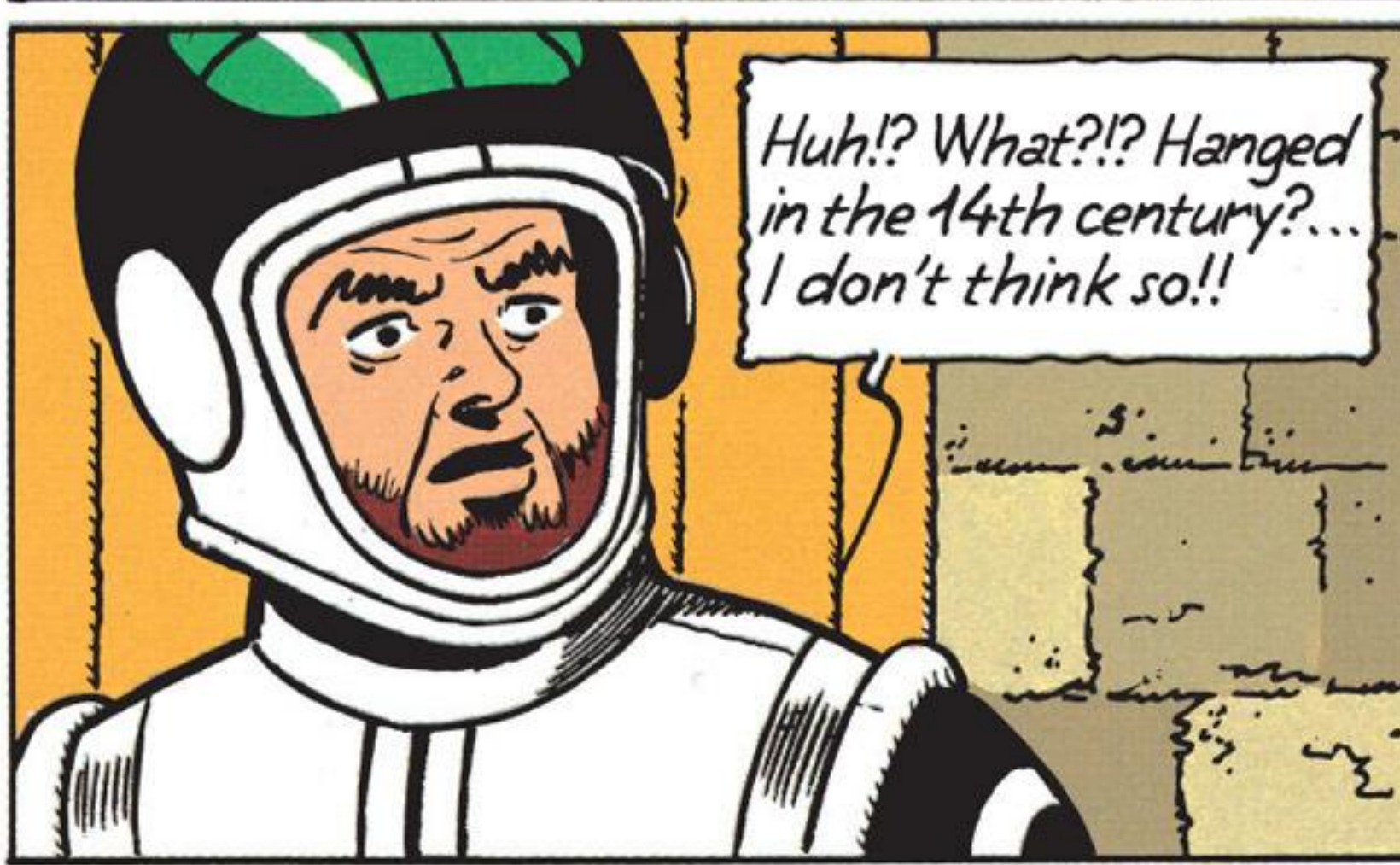
HIS WORDS STARTLE THE BARON...



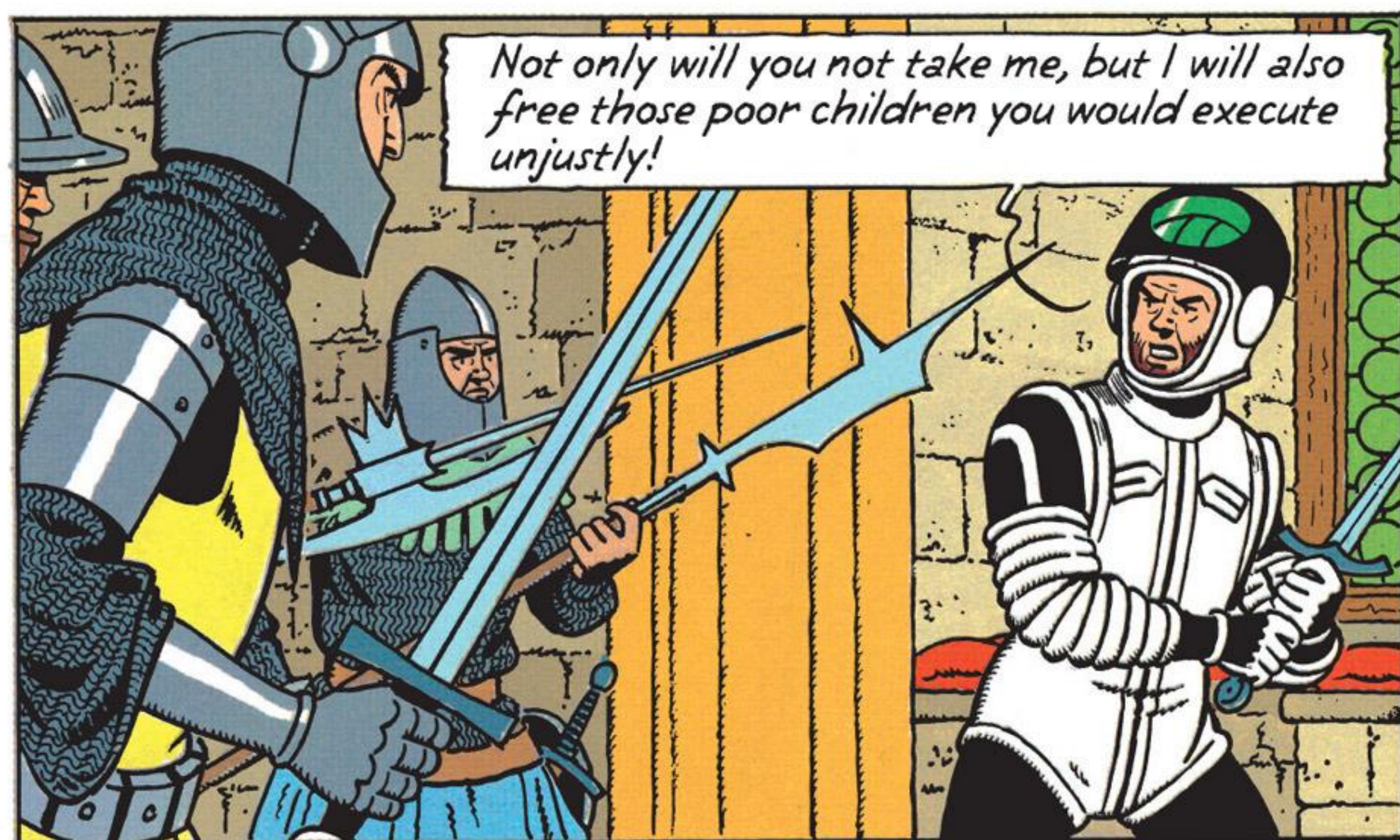
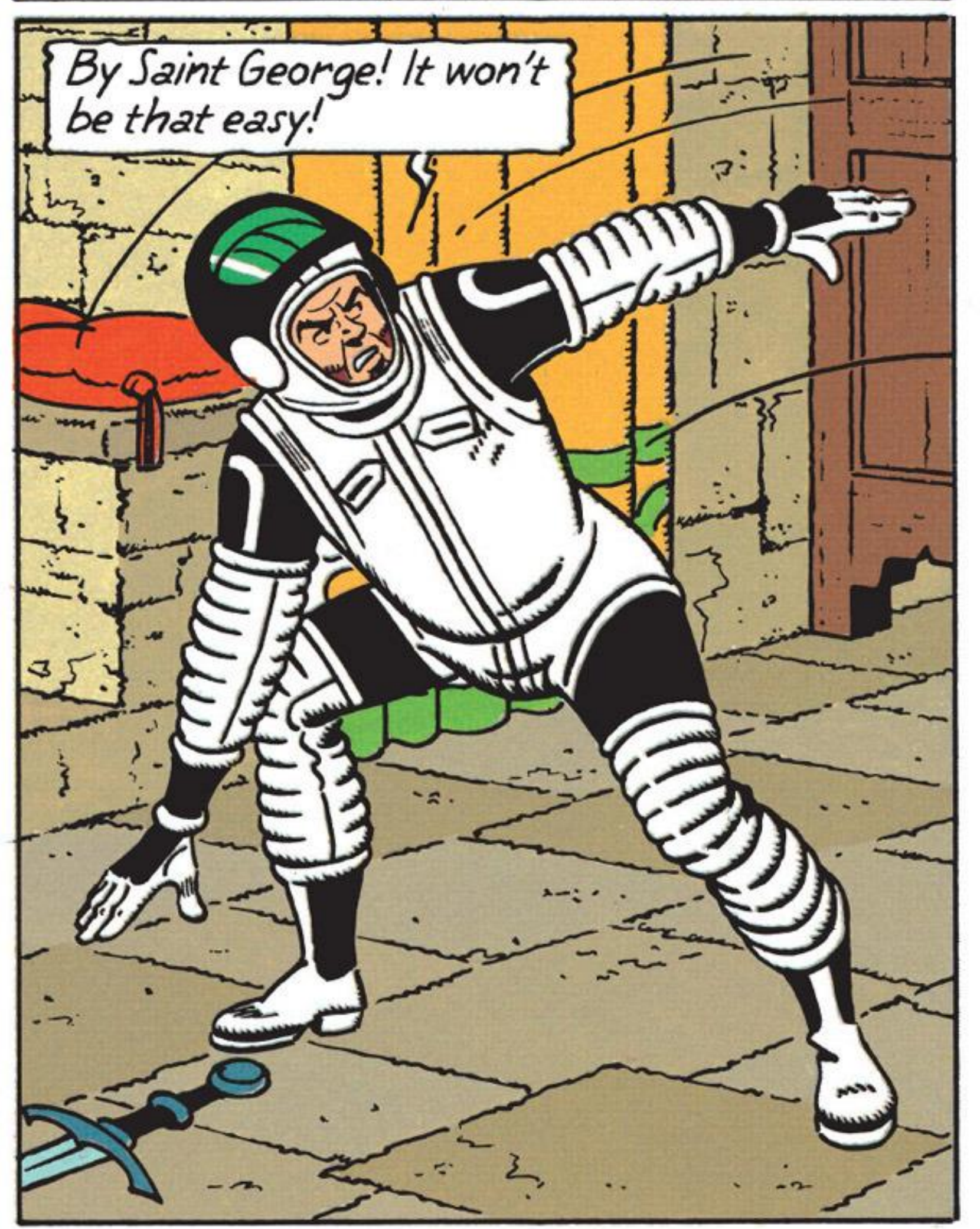
AWARE THAT TELLING THE UNBELIEVABLE TRUTH TO SIR DE LA ROCHE WOULD BE POINTLESS, MORTIMER CAN DO LITTLE BUT BABBLE HALF-HEARTEDLY...



THAT ORDER BRINGS MORTIMER BACK TO REALITY...



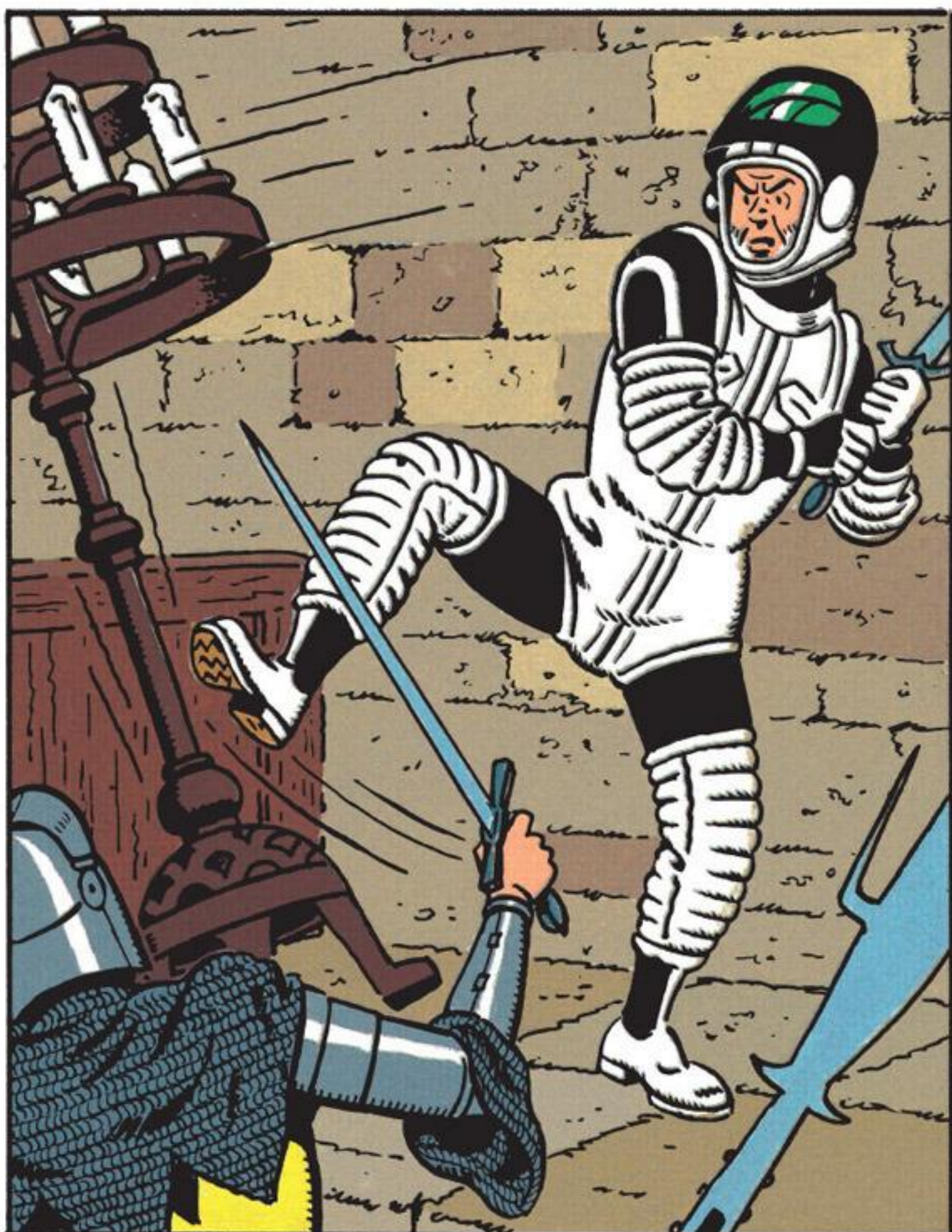
AND AS THE MEN-AT-ARMS CONVERGE ON HIM AND THE PASSAGE CLOSES, HE SWIFTLY PICKS UP THE SWORD OF THE GUARD HE BOWLED OVER!



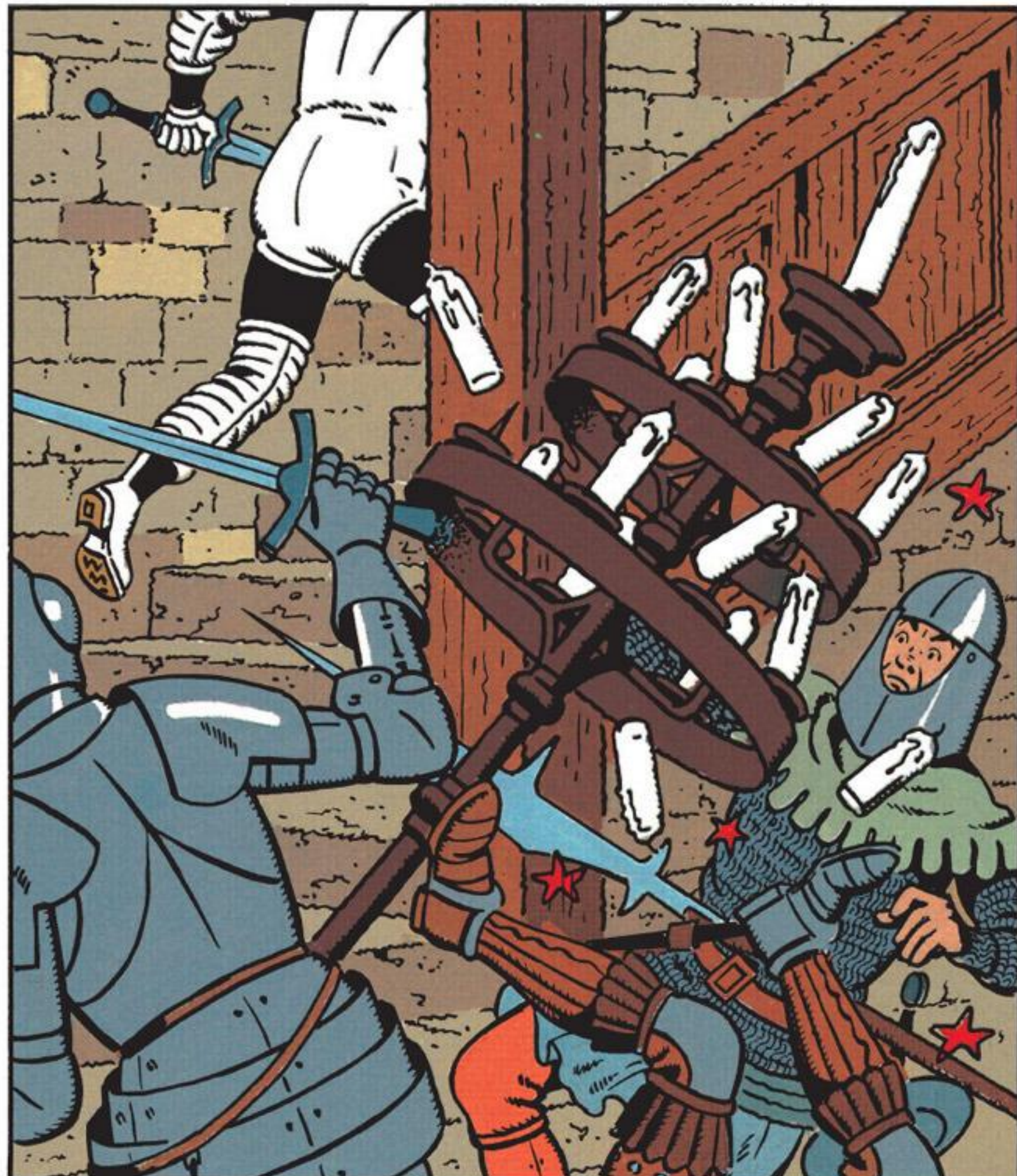
HACKING AND SLASHING, OUR FRIEND FIGHTS LIKE A LION, BUT IS SOON CORNERED AT THE BOTTOM OF A STAIRCASE...



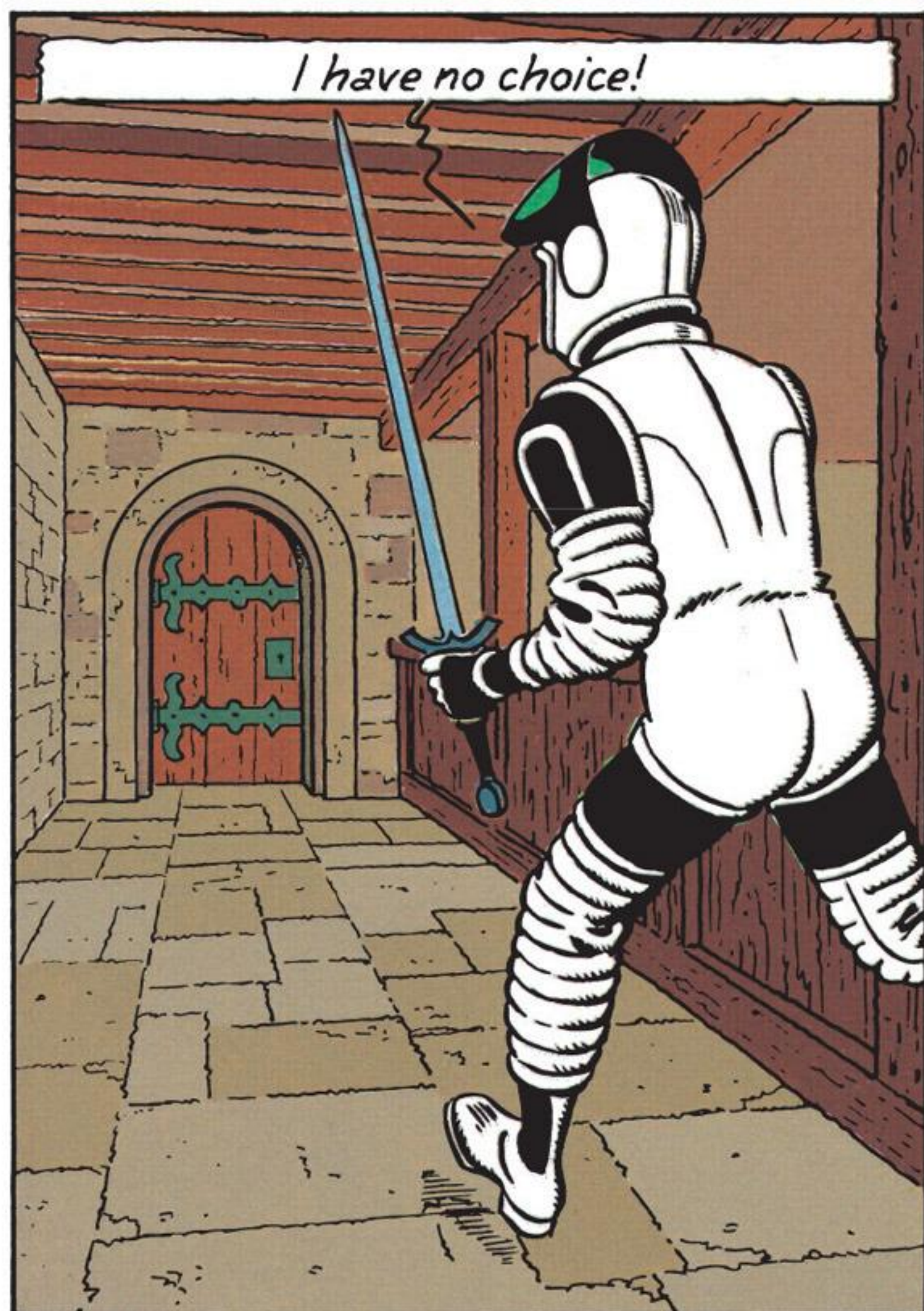
NOTICING A HEAVY IRON CANDELABRA, MORTIMER KICKS IT DOWN ONTO HIS FOES...



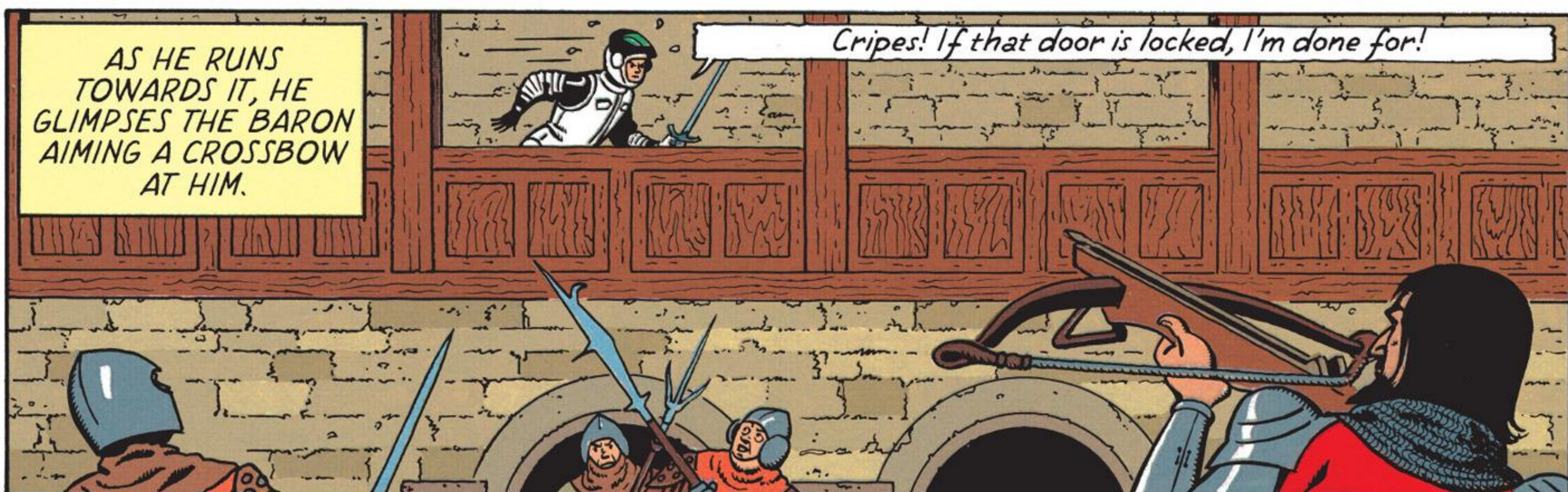
...AND TAKES ADVANTAGE OF THEIR TEMPORARY CONFUSION TO HURRY UP THE STAIRS.



IN NO TIME HE'S REACHED THE GALLERY OVERLOOKING THE HALL, AND THE ONLY OTHER EXIT IS A LOW, THICK DOOR...



AS HE RUNS TOWARDS IT, HE GLIMPSES THE BARON AIMING A CROSSBOW AT HIM.

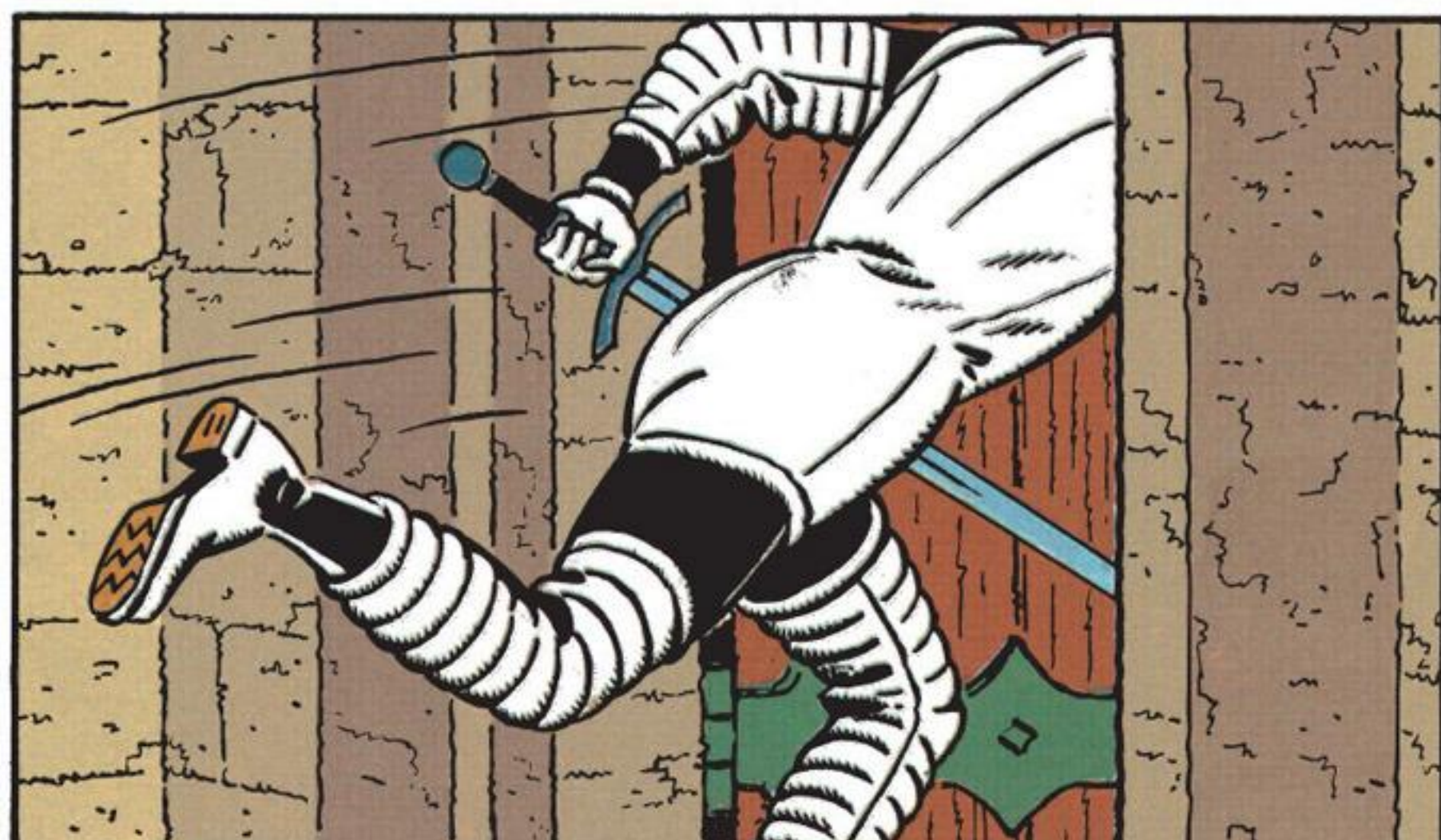


Cripes! If that door is locked, I'm done for!

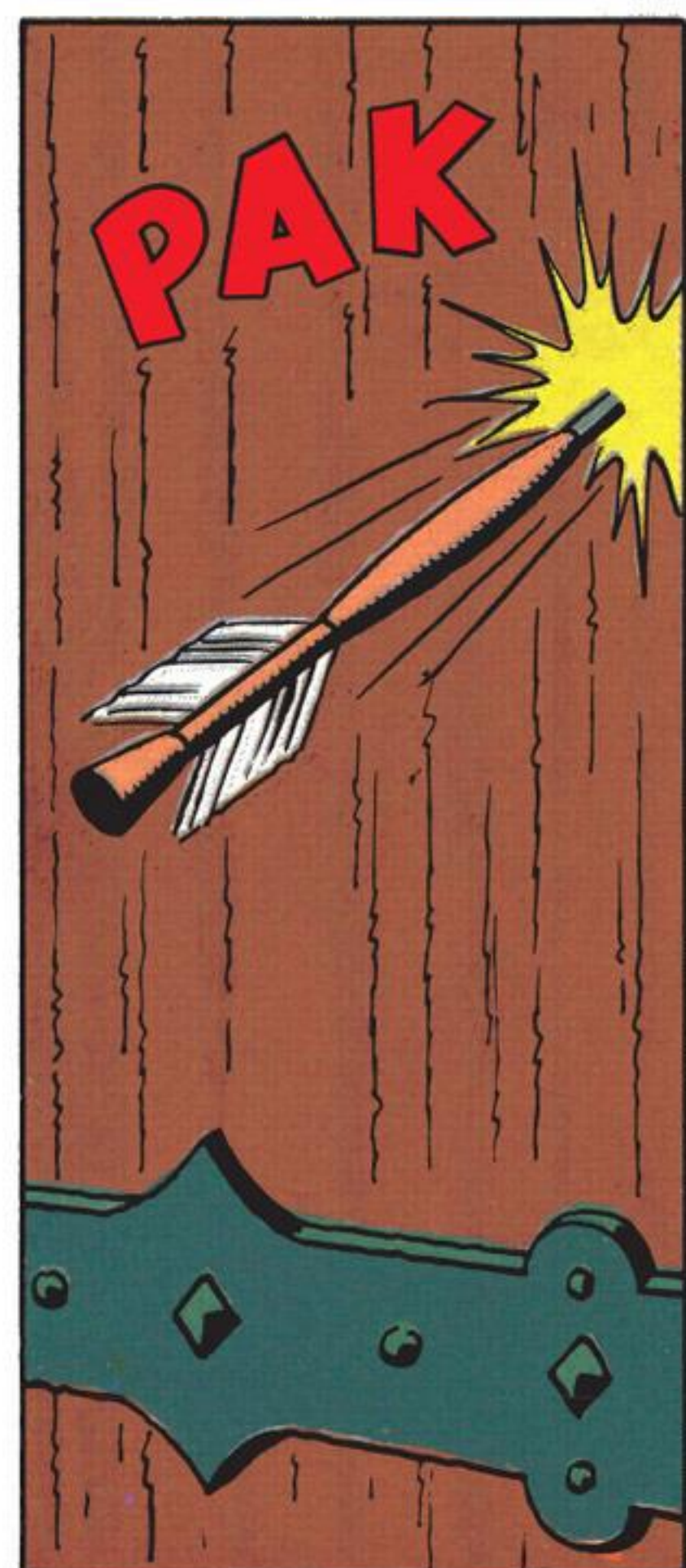
JUST THEN, AS IF IN ANSWER TO HIS WORDS, THE DOOR SOFTLY OPENS A CRACK...



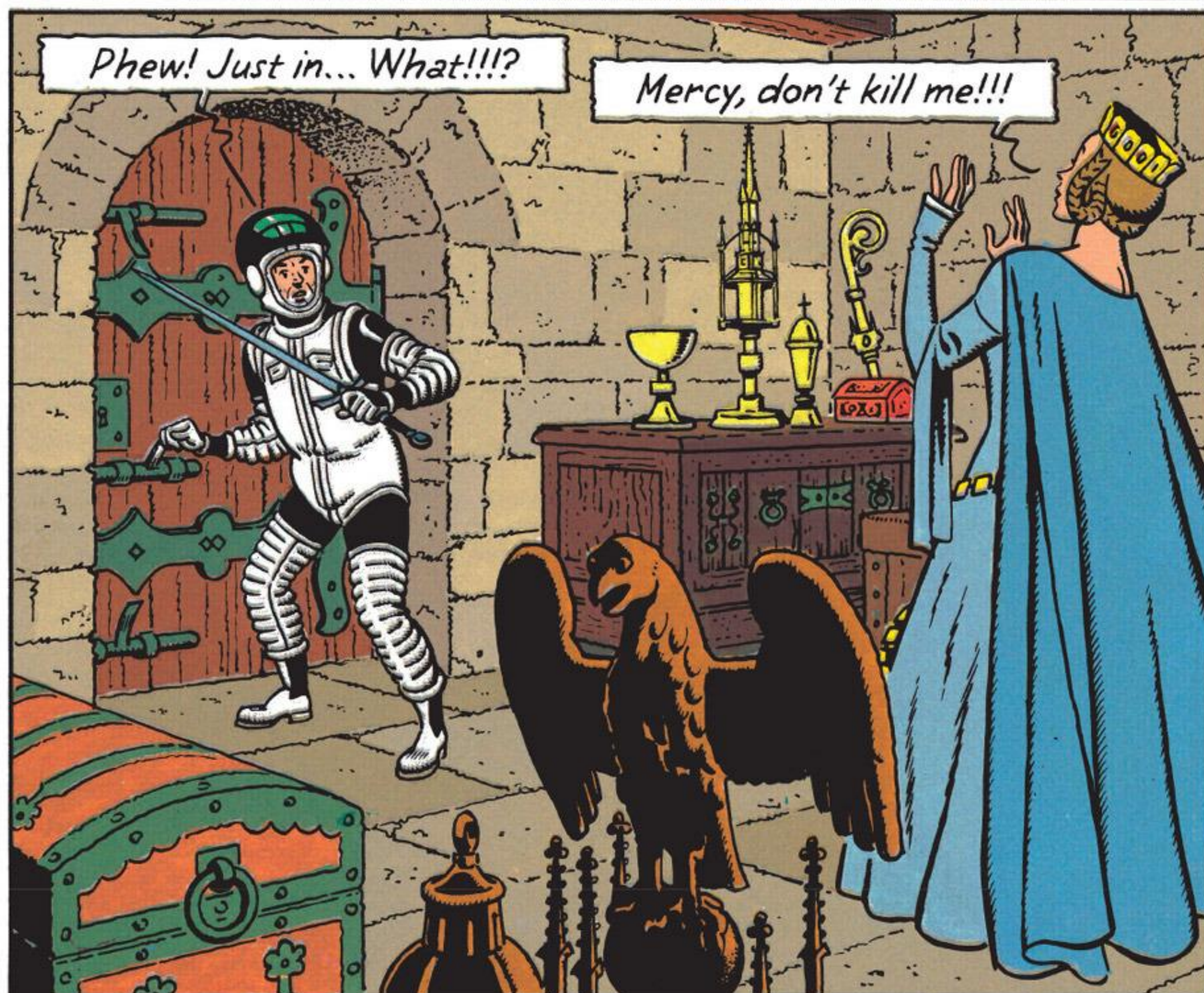
WITHOUT HESITATION, HE RUSHES TOWARDS THE DOOR, FORCING IT OPEN WITH ALL HIS MIGHT AND THROWING HIMSELF INSIDE...



...JUST AS A CROSSBOW BOLT SLAMS INTO THE WOOD PRECISELY WHERE HE WAS AN INSTANT BEFORE.

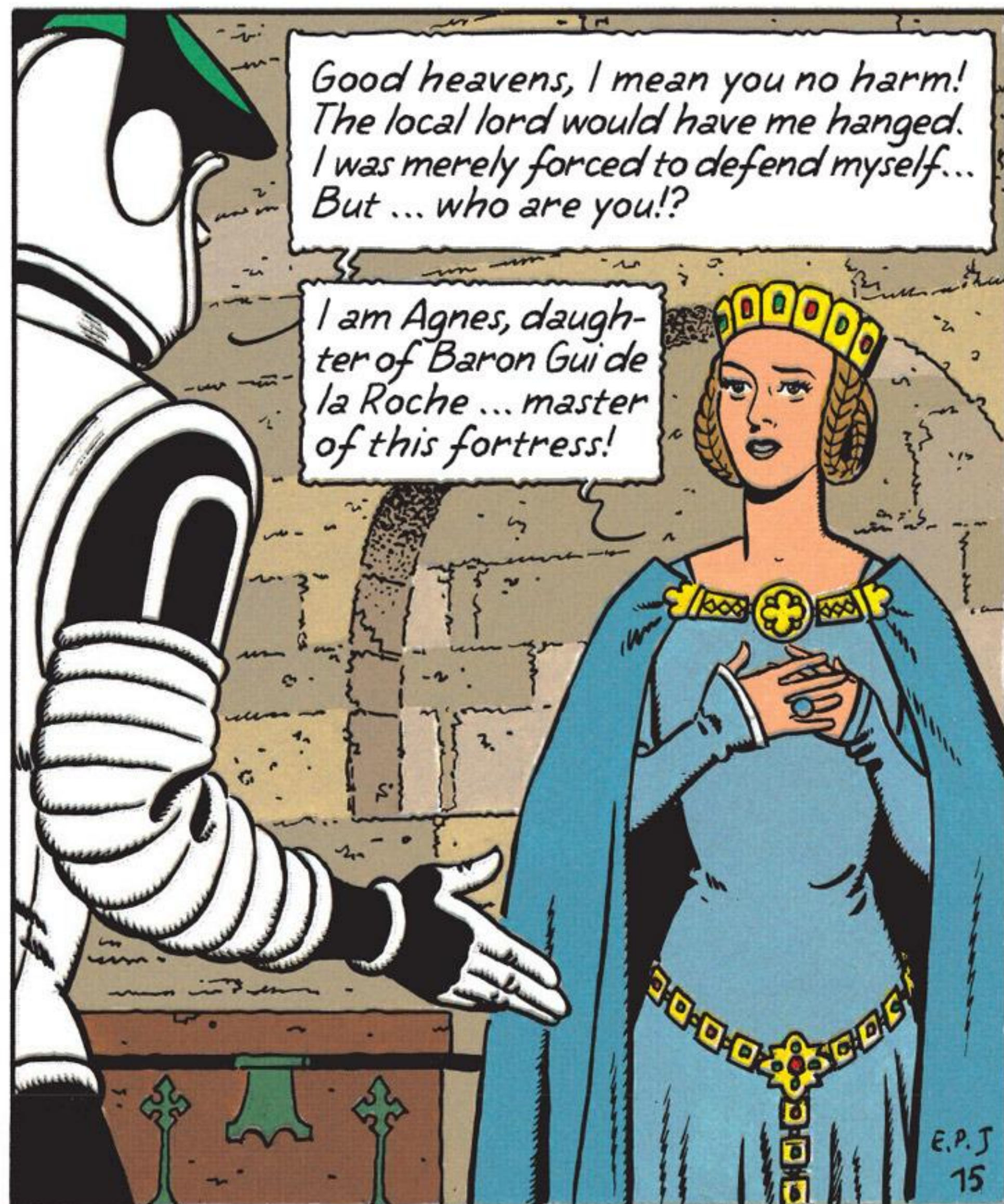


ALREADY MORTIMER HAS CLOSED THE DOOR AND SECURED THE MASSIVE DEADLOCKS. BUT IN THE HEAT OF THE MOMENT, HE HASN'T EVEN NOTICED THAT HIS FORCEFUL ENTRANCE HAS DISTURBED AN OBVIOUSLY TERRIFIED YOUNG WOMAN.



Good heavens, I mean you no harm! The local lord would have me hanged. I was merely forced to defend myself... But ... who are you!?

I am Agnes, daughter of Baron Gui de la Roche ... master of this fortress!



MORTIMER'S SURPRISE IS SUCH THAT HE DOESN'T EVEN HEAR THE HEAVY BLOWS THAT RATTLE THE DOOR BEHIND HIM.

But... What are you doing here all alone?

Alas, sir, my father ordered me to take refuge in this room where he keeps his treasures, as all that is going on frightens me so. Those poor children facing death... Those rioting peasants massed before our walls... Oh! How terrible they are, those 'Jacques'...

'Jacques'?... Did you say the 'Jacques'? Isn't that the nickname given to those serfs that had risen up against the nobles and wreaked bloody havoc throughout the country?... By Jove, I arrived in the middle of the 'Jacquerie'...

Their leader is a giant who goes by the name of Jacques Bonhomme, but...

BUT SHE DOESN'T HAVE TIME TO SAY MORE, AS A BLOOD-CURDLING CLAMOUR RISES FROM THE INNER COURTYARD.

Good Lord!!

What is that?

HAVING RUSHED TO THE TOWER'S TERRACE, AGNES AND MORTIMER, HORRIFIED, WITNESS THE SCREAMING HORDE OF JACQUES STORMING INTO THE CASTLE...

I see - some treacherous servant must have opened the doors!!! We're doomed...

No, there's still one chance: the main hall's hidden staircase!... Better to face your father and his guards than those fellows down there... Come!

MEANWHILE, FACED WITH THE DRAMATIC TURN OF EVENTS, THE BARON DE LA ROCHE HAS RALLIED HIS LAST MEN...

BUT THE DEFENDERS DON'T EVEN HAVE THE TIME TO ARRAY THEMSELVES, FOR AT THAT MOMENT A MOB OF SNARLING DEMONS BREAKS DOWN THE HALL'S DOOR...

AND MORTIMER, WHO HAD JUST STEPPED OUT ONTO THE GALLERY, HURRIEDLY STEPS BACK...

To me, my good men! Repel the rabble!!

Death! Death! Kill!

Too late!

A HOPELESS BATTLE RAGES FOR A SHORT TIME, BUT THE BARON AND HIS MEN ARE QUICKLY BROUGHT DOWN AND MERCILESSLY SLAUGHTERED...



A VOICE RISES OVER THE TRIUMPHANT SHOUTING - THAT OF ONE OF THE TRAITOROUS SERVANTS, SCREAMING...

The treasure is ours now, companions!... Follow me!!!



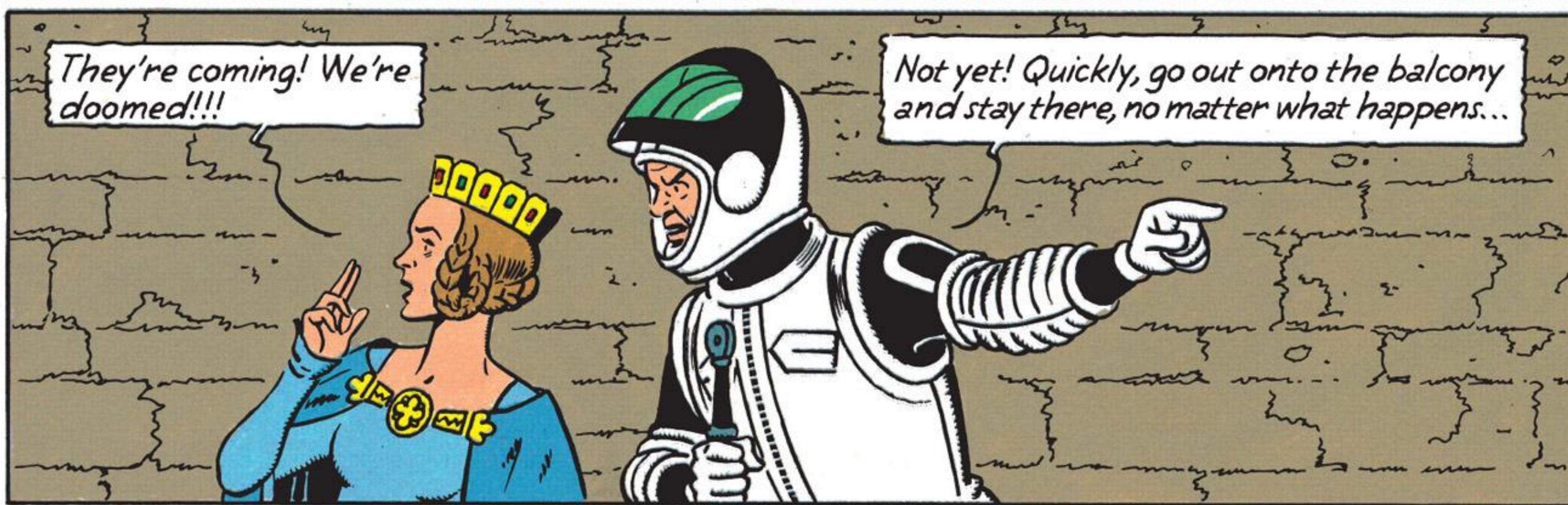
IMMEDIATELY, THE MULTITUDE RUSHES UP THE STAIRS AND FLOODS THE GALLERY...



IN MINUTES, MORTIMER HAS OVERTURNED SOME FURNITURE INTO A MAKESHIFT BASTION WHILE THE DOOR RATTLES UNDER THE MASSIVE BLOWS OF THE ANGRY CROWD...



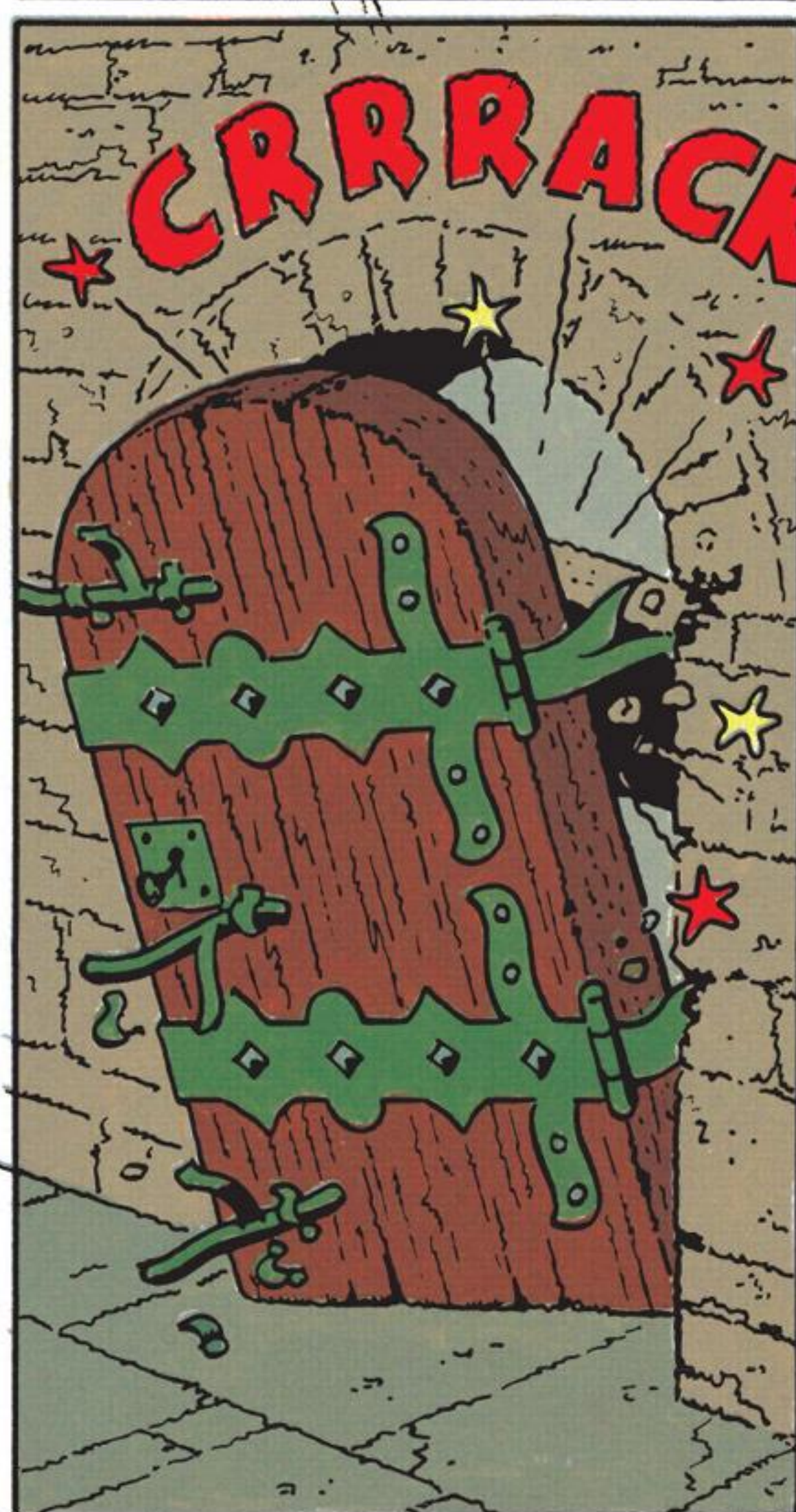
This way they won't be able to flank me...



THE ATTACKERS SWING THEIR IMPROVISED RAM WITH FIERCE ENERGY.



AND SUDDENLY...



...A MASS OF RED, SWEATY FACES ARE LOOKING THROUGH THE OPENING, STARING WITH ASTONISHMENT AT MORTIMER WHO, SWORD IN HAND, WAITS FOR THE COMING SHOCK...



IN THE SILENCE THAT FOLLOWS THE COMMOTION OF THE BREAKTHROUGH, MORTIMER EXPLAINS IN A LOUD VOICE:

Stop! I am not your enemy! These riches are yours – take them!... But do not lay a hand on Agnes de la Roche. She is under my protection.



HIS WORDS ARE GREETED BY AN EXPLOSION OF SHOUTS, LAUGHTER AND THREATS...

Who's this, then?
Will you look at him!
Where did he get that armour!?
Ha! Ha!
A fine figure he cuts!
And oh so generous!!... Ha! Ha!
We'll take what we please!...
And the head, too, for good measure! Ha! Ha!



BUT A TALL MAN CUTS HIS WAY THROUGH THE CROWD...

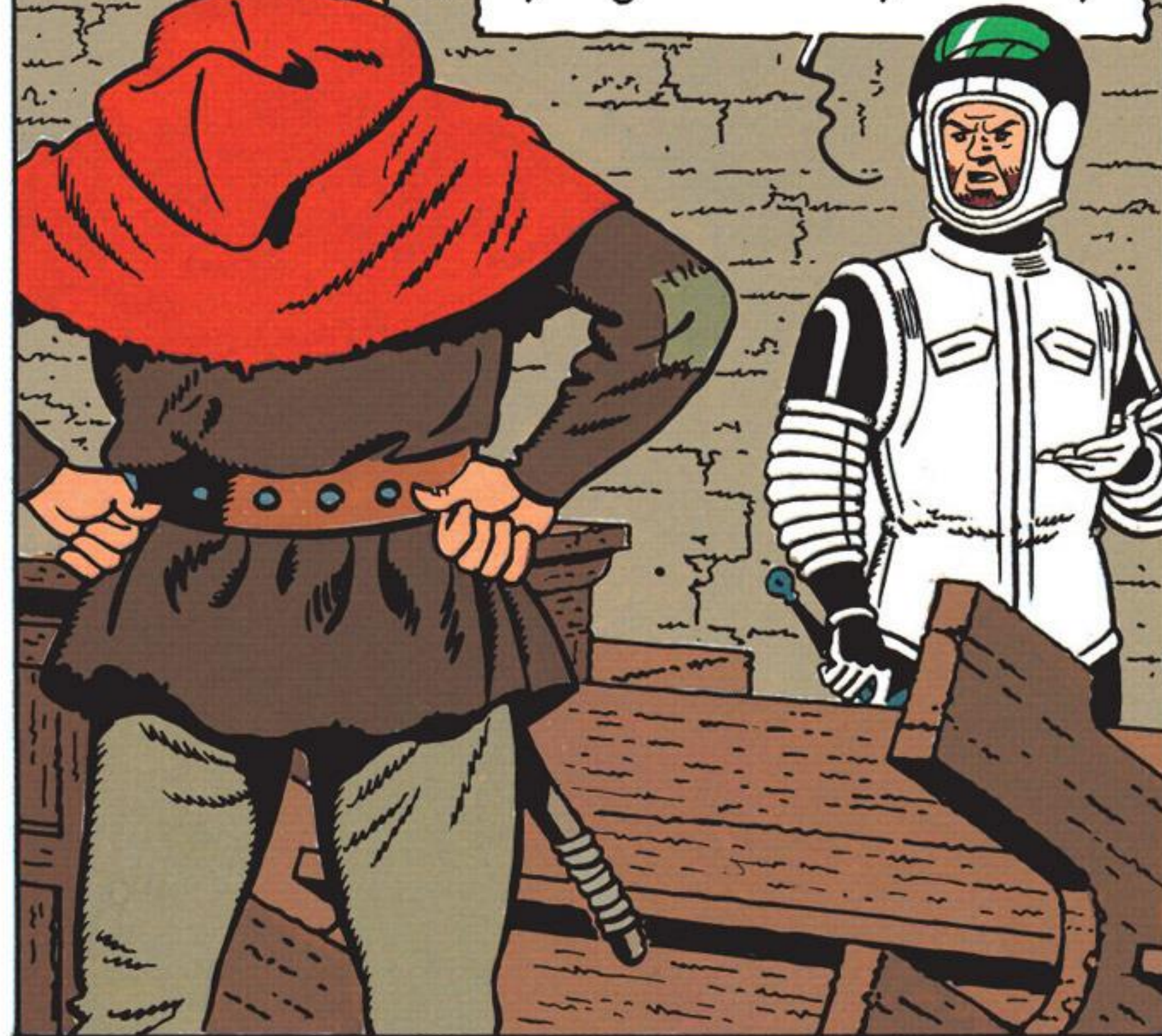
Here's our leader!
Long live Jacques!!
Make way!!!



THE GIANT-SIZED NEWCOMER ADDRESSES THE PROFESSOR...

So, you would tell us what to do, then?...
Us, the victors!... Who are you?

I am English, and my name would mean nothing to you. But I'll say it again: I am not your enemy!



Bah! English, Navarrese, French...
You're all our enemies! And I, Jacques Bonhomme, say that you're on the side of tyrants! And as such you will die – as well as the maid, who's nothing but bad seed!!

Stop!!



THE CHAPLAIN OF THE CASTLE, SPARED BY THE POPULACE BECAUSE OF HIS WELL-KNOWN KINDNESS, STEPS FORWARD...

This gentleman speaks the truth! He did his best to save the two children sentenced to death...



DISPLEASED, THE GIANT MAKES A SOUR FACE...

Fine! But even if he isn't the baron's friend, he's still one of his ilk – an enemy of the people!... And an Englishman to boot!!! Still...



...AND CONTINUES WITH AN EVIL SMILE.

...Still, considering what he did, I'll be generous... We will meet in single combat, man to man, on the terrace. And I swear before this holy man that if you should be victorious, not only will you and Agnes be spared, but I will even give you the treasure... What say you!?...
I accept the challenge – choose your weapons!



THE LEADER CANNOT SUPPRESS A TRIUMPHANT SMILE.

Perfect!... Here are my weapons: my hands... Nothing more!!!
As you wish!

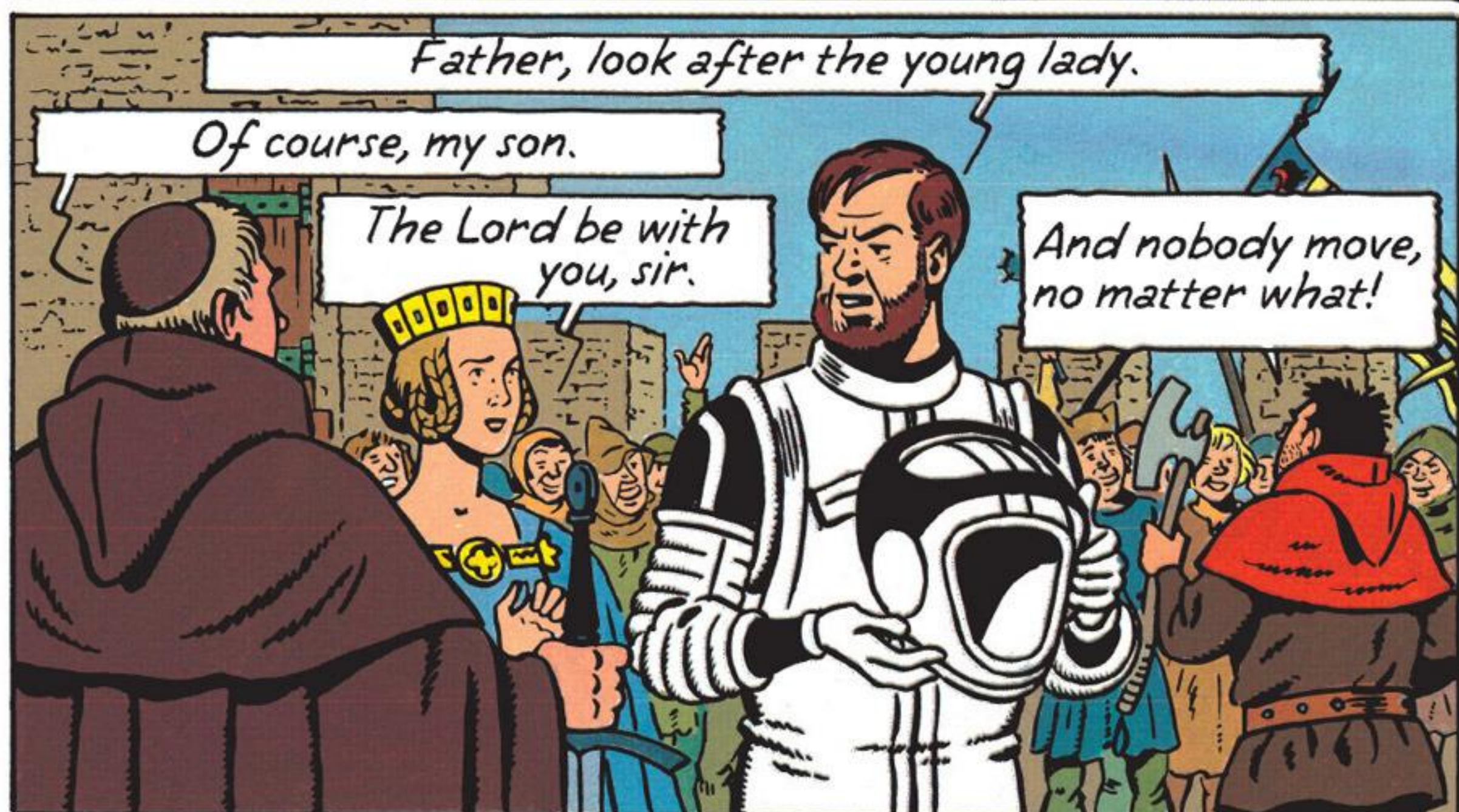


UPON HIS WORDS, A VAST CLAMOUR MAKES THE WALLS SHAKE...

Ha! Ha! He's going to tear him limb from limb!
Ha! Ha! Poor gentleman!
Ha! Ha! He has no idea what's in store for him!
Ha! Ha! My share of the loot if he wins!!



THE TWO MEN HAVE STEPPED OUT ONTO THE TERRACE, FOLLOWED BY THE LAUGHING HORDE OF RAGGEDY REBELS.



JUST AS THE BRUTE'S HANDS ARE ABOUT TO GRAB HIM, MORTIMER SUDDENLY SEIZES HIS CLOTHING...



...AND, THROWING HIMSELF BACK, PLACES HIS RIGHT FOOT ON THE MAN'S STOMACH. PULLED OFF BALANCE, BONHOMME FALLS FORWARD...



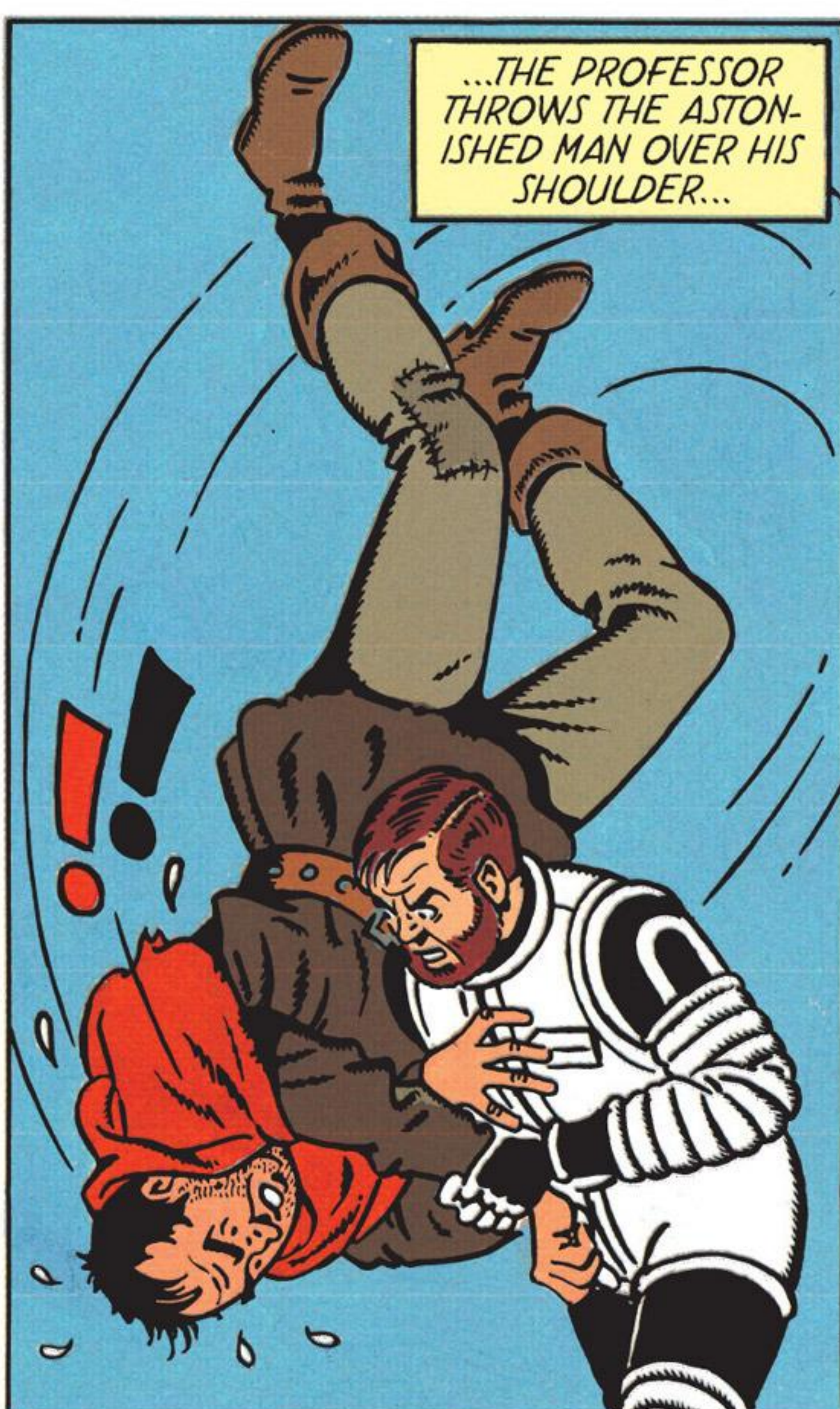
...BUT WITH A SOLID PUSH OF HIS LEG, OUR FRIEND THROWS HIM INTO THE AIR...



...AND THE GIANT CRASHES HEAVILY TO THE GROUND!



MORTIMER HAS IMMEDIATELY JUMPED TO HIS FEET. HIS OPPONENT, STUNNED AND COMPLETELY CONFOUNDED BY THIS UNKNOWN FIGHTING STYLE, SLOWLY GETS UP, GROWLING.



...AND BACK ONTO THE FLAGSTONES, WHERE HE IS HELD, POWERLESS AND HALF-UNCONSCIOUS, IN A SOLID WRIST LOCK...



THE JACQUES, WHO FOLLOWED THE UNUSUAL DUEL WITH GROWING AMAZEMENT, ARE DISMAYED BY ITS UNEXPECTED RESULT...



MORTIMER, HAVING RELEASED HIS DEFEATED OPPONENT, HAS NOW PUT HIS HELMET BACK ON AND RETRIEVED HIS SWORD...



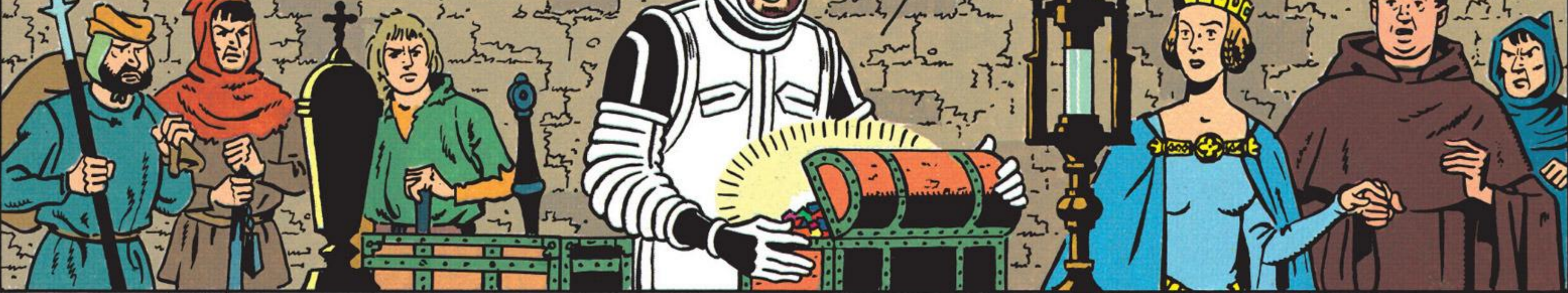
GUIDING AN UNSTEADY AGNES, HE WHISPERS TO HER...



Good... Chaplain, you go first with Agnes and wait for me near the big wardrobe to the right of the passage. Make it look like you're looking for something in it...



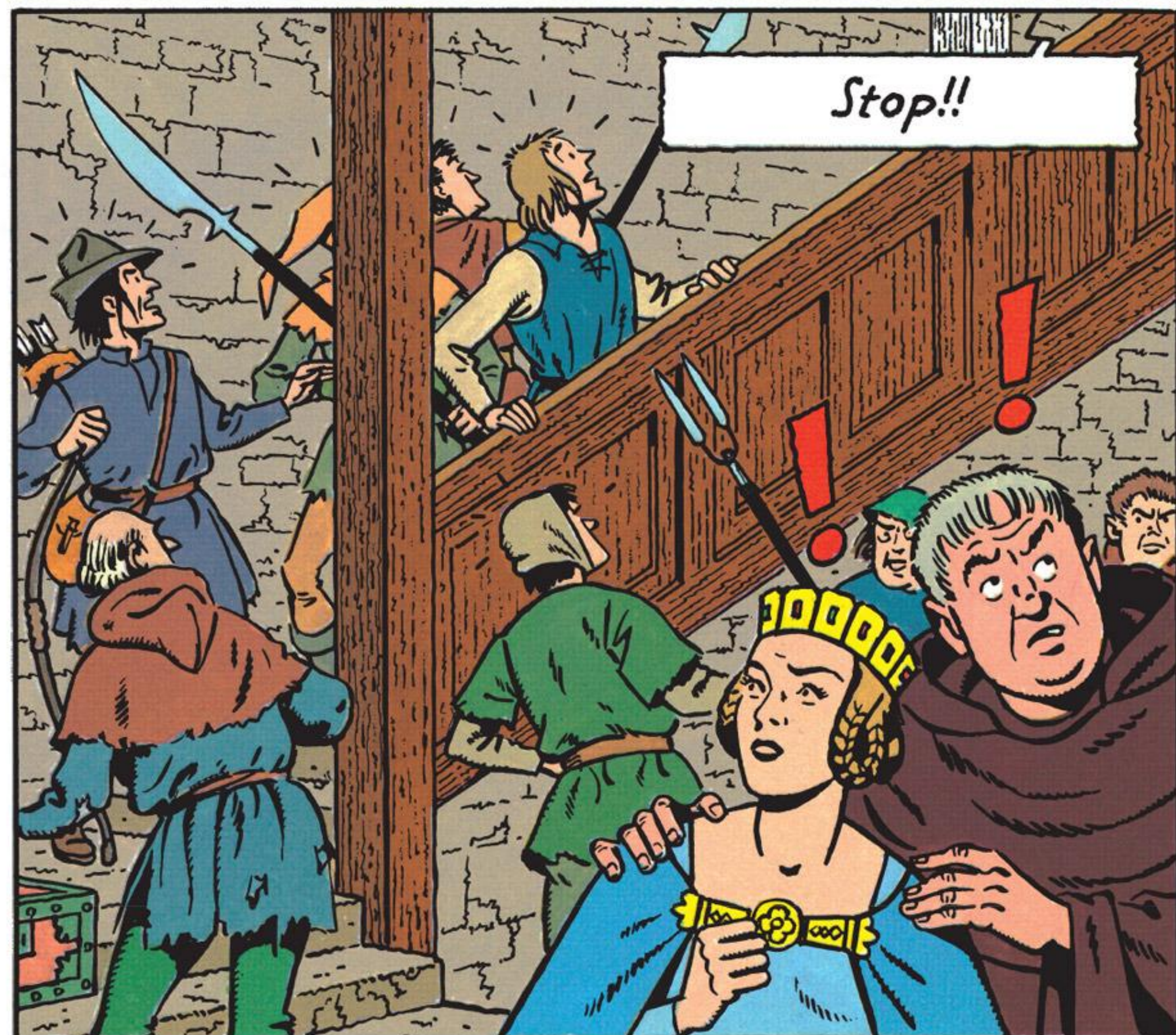
BUT AS HE GOES THROUGH THE TREASURE ROOM, MORTIMER SEES A COUPLE OF COFFERS FILLED WITH JEWELS...



...THEN, EXITING ONTO THE GALLERY, MORTIMER, WHOM THE SERFS REGARD WITH HATRED, LETS THE CHAPLAIN AND THE MAIDEN GET AHEAD OF HIM...



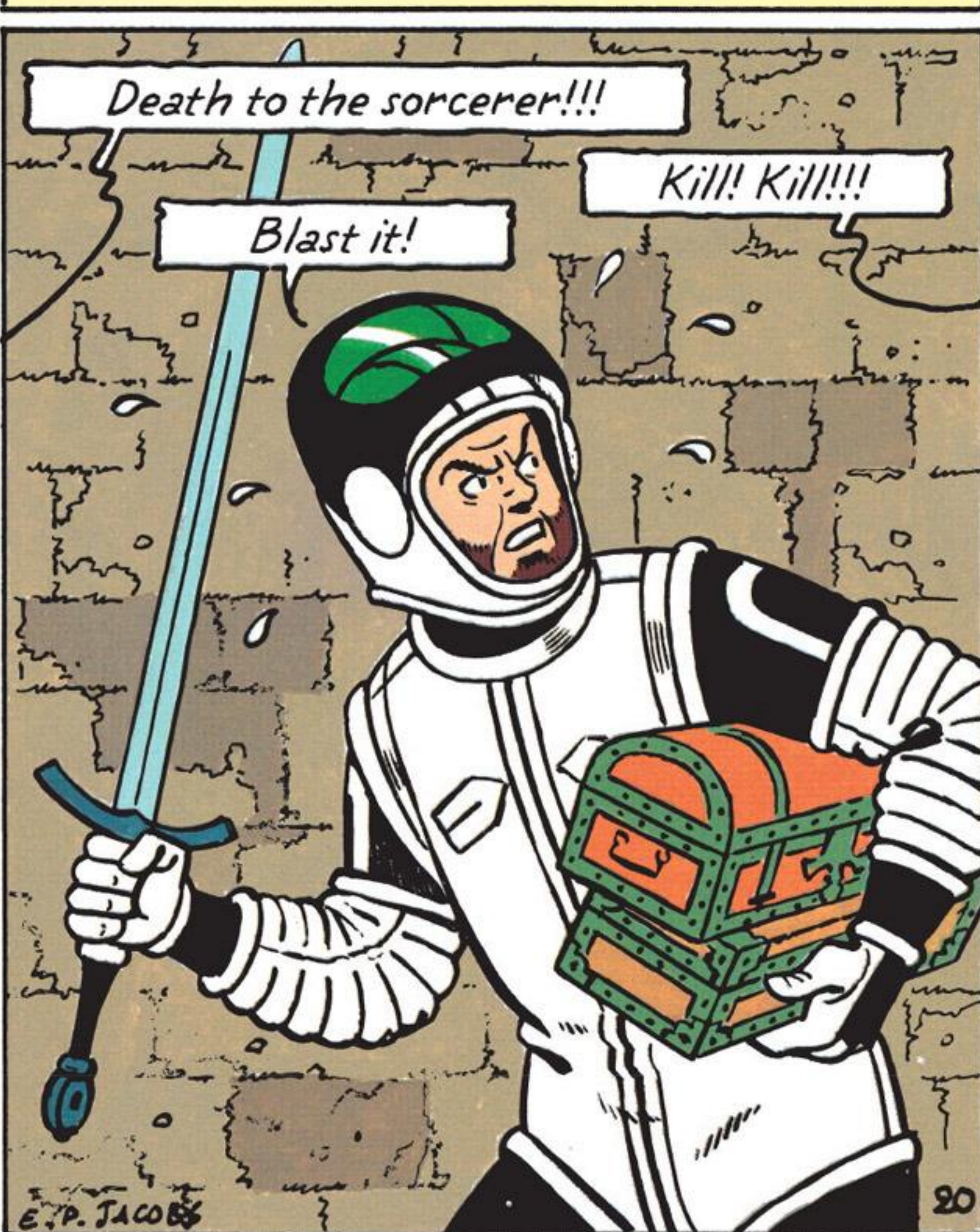
AMID A DEATHLY SILENCE, AGNES AND THE MAN OF THE CLOTH HAVE REACHED THE GREAT HALL AND ARE HEADING TOWARDS THE AGREED SPOT. JUST AS THEY THINK THEY ARE SAFE, SUDDENLY...



JACQUES BONHOMME HAS FINALLY RECOVERED FROM HIS DESPONDENCY, AND BURSTS ONTO THE GALLERY, BLIND WITH RAGE.



THEIR LEADER'S VOICE JOLTS THE JACQUES OUT OF THEIR PARALYSIS, AND THEY RUSH AT THE ESCAPEES. MORTIMER, CUT OFF FROM HIS COMPANIONS, IS SURROUNDED...



TRAPPED ON THE NARROW GALLERY, WHERE HE CANNOT USE HIS TWO-HANDED SWORD, MORTIMER IS STRUCK BY A SUDDEN INSPIRATION. HE THROWS THE TWO COFFERS AT HIS ATTACKERS, SMASHING THEM ON THE FLOOR AND SPILLING THEIR CONTENTS...



THE SIGHT OF THE GEMS ENFLAMES THE SERFS' GREED AND THEY BEGIN SQUABBLING RUTHLESSLY AMONG THEMSELVES!



You dogs! He's tricking you! See: he's escaping!!!

I may break my neck – but I have to jump!



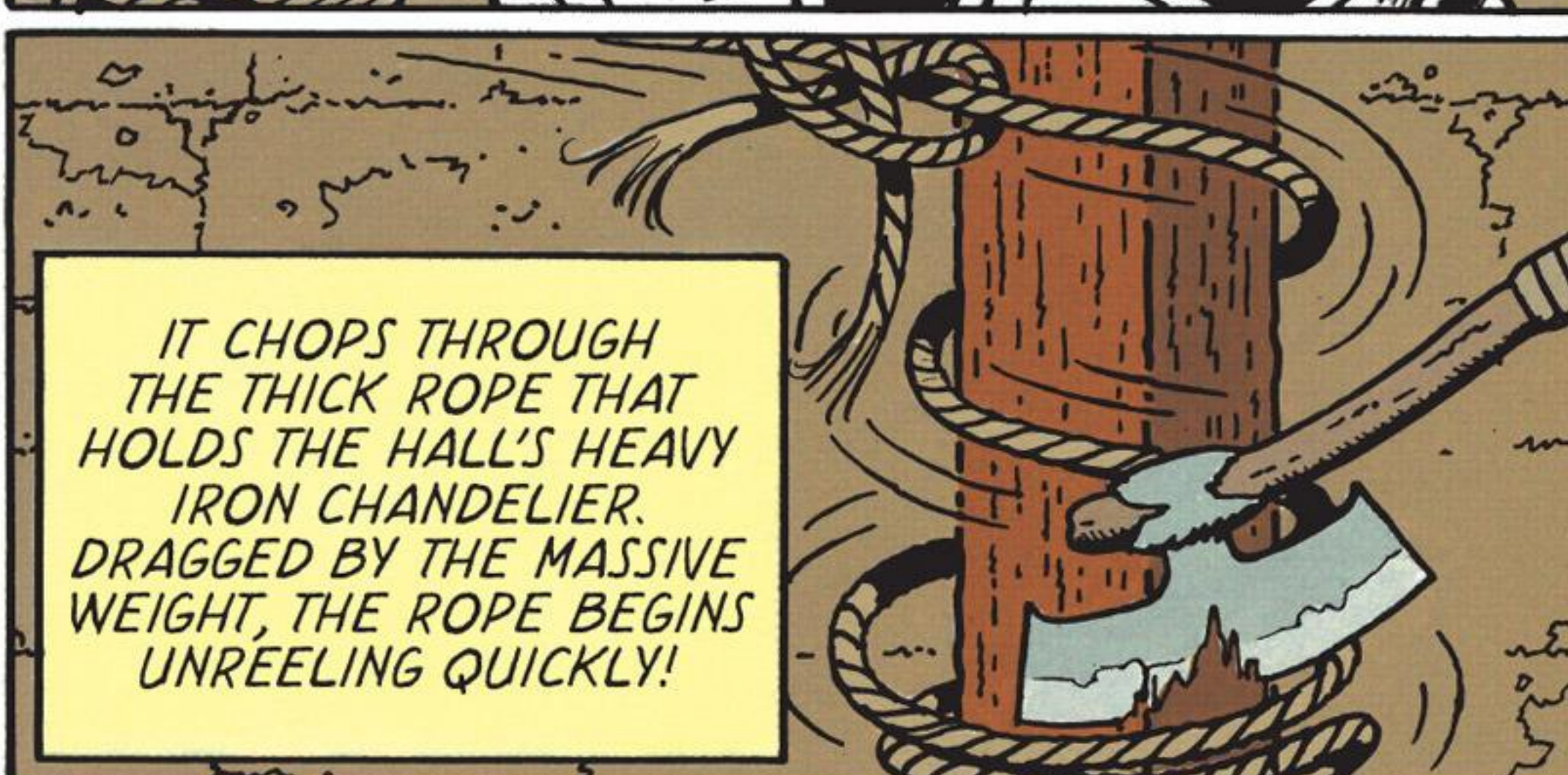
BLOCKED BY THE CONFUSED CROWD, THE GIANT BELLOWS HIS FURY AND...



...THE HEAVY AXE WHISTLES PAST OUR HERO'S HEAD BEFORE SLAMMING INTO A POST BEHIND HIM!



IT CHOPS THROUGH THE THICK ROPE THAT HOLDS THE HALL'S HEAVY IRON CHANDELIER. DRAGGED BY THE MASSIVE WEIGHT, THE ROPE BEGINS UNREELING QUICKLY!



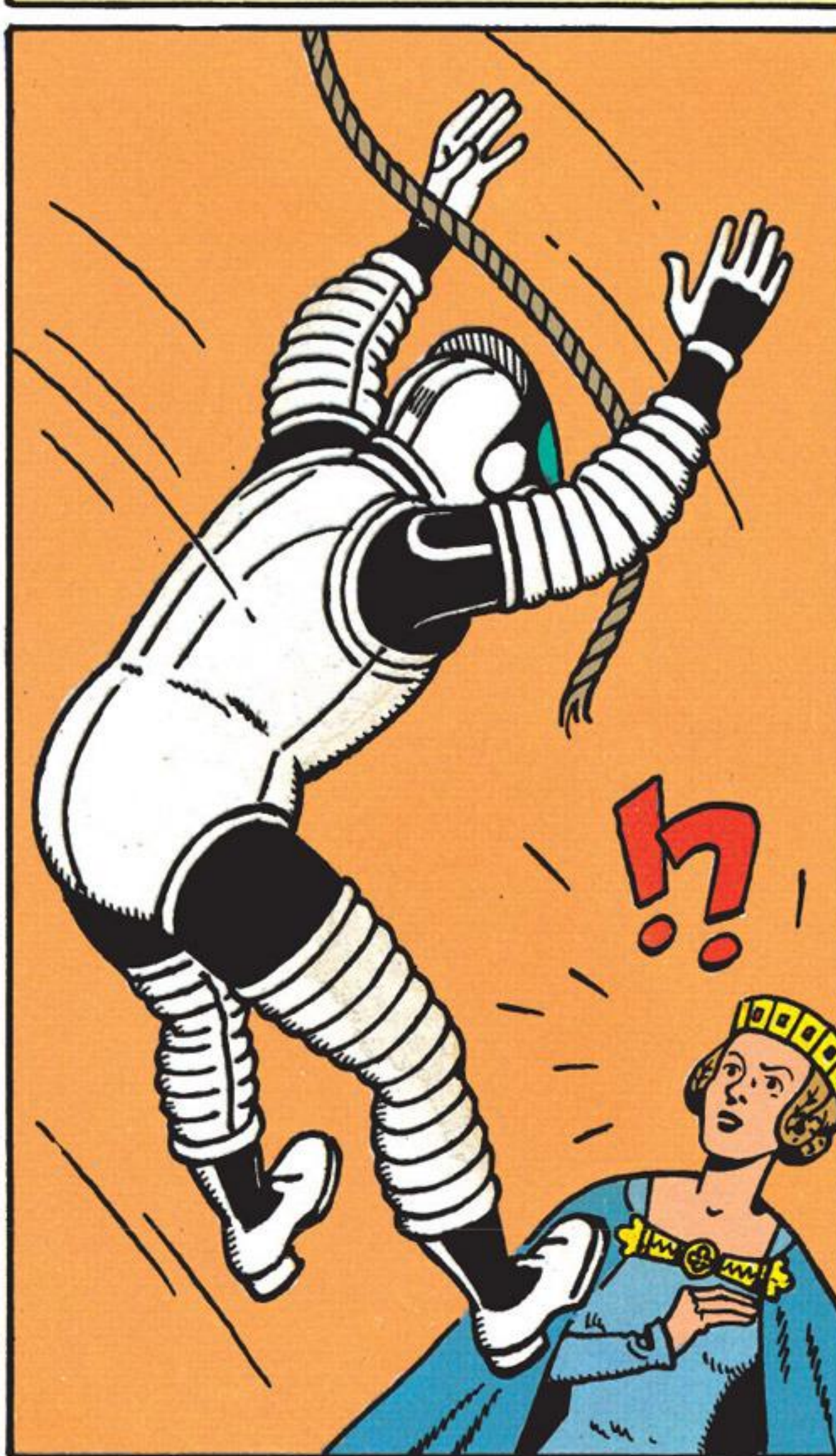
LETTING HIS INSTINCTS TAKE OVER, MORTIMER GRABS IT AS IT GOES BY AND IS DRAWN OVER THE PARAPET!



...HE FLIES ABOVE THE MASS OF RUSHING RIOTERS...



...BEFORE LANDING AT THE FOOT OF AN ASTONISHED AGNES!



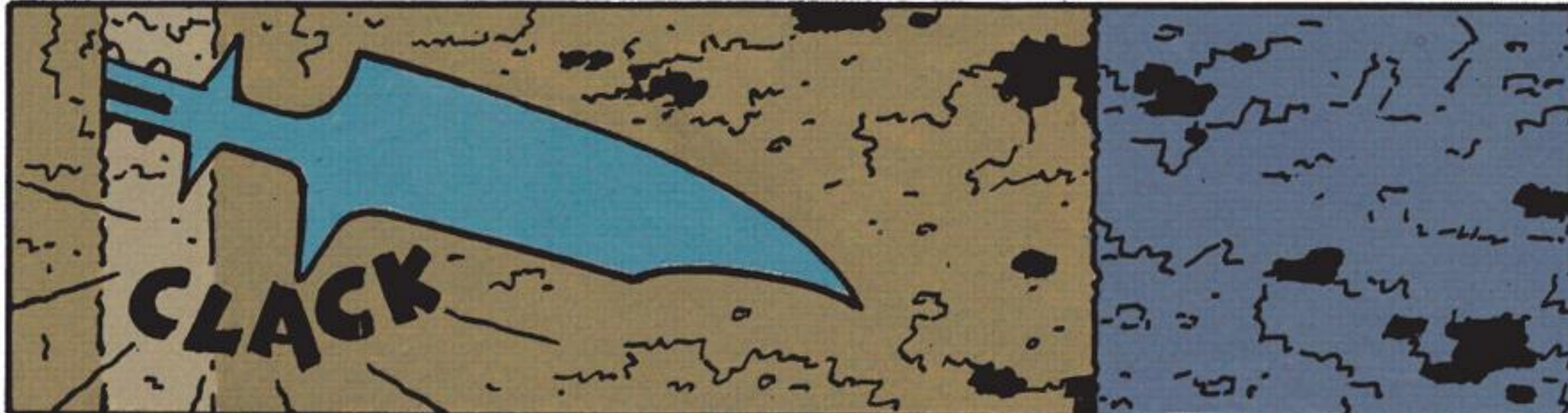
THE SERFS, HOWEVER, HAVE NO TIME TO REACT, FOR THE UNTIED CHANDELIER THEN CRASHES ONTO THEM WITH A TERRIBLE DIN!



TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE CONFUSION, AGNES HAS TRIGGERED THE OPENING MECHANISM. THE SECRET DOOR SWINGS OPEN AND THE RUNAWAYS ESCAPE INTO THE PASSAGE...



...SLAMMING THE HEAVY STONE PANEL BEHIND THEM – BUT NOT FAST ENOUGH TO PREVENT THE BLADE OF A VOULGE FROM BEING SHOVED THROUGH THE OPENING.

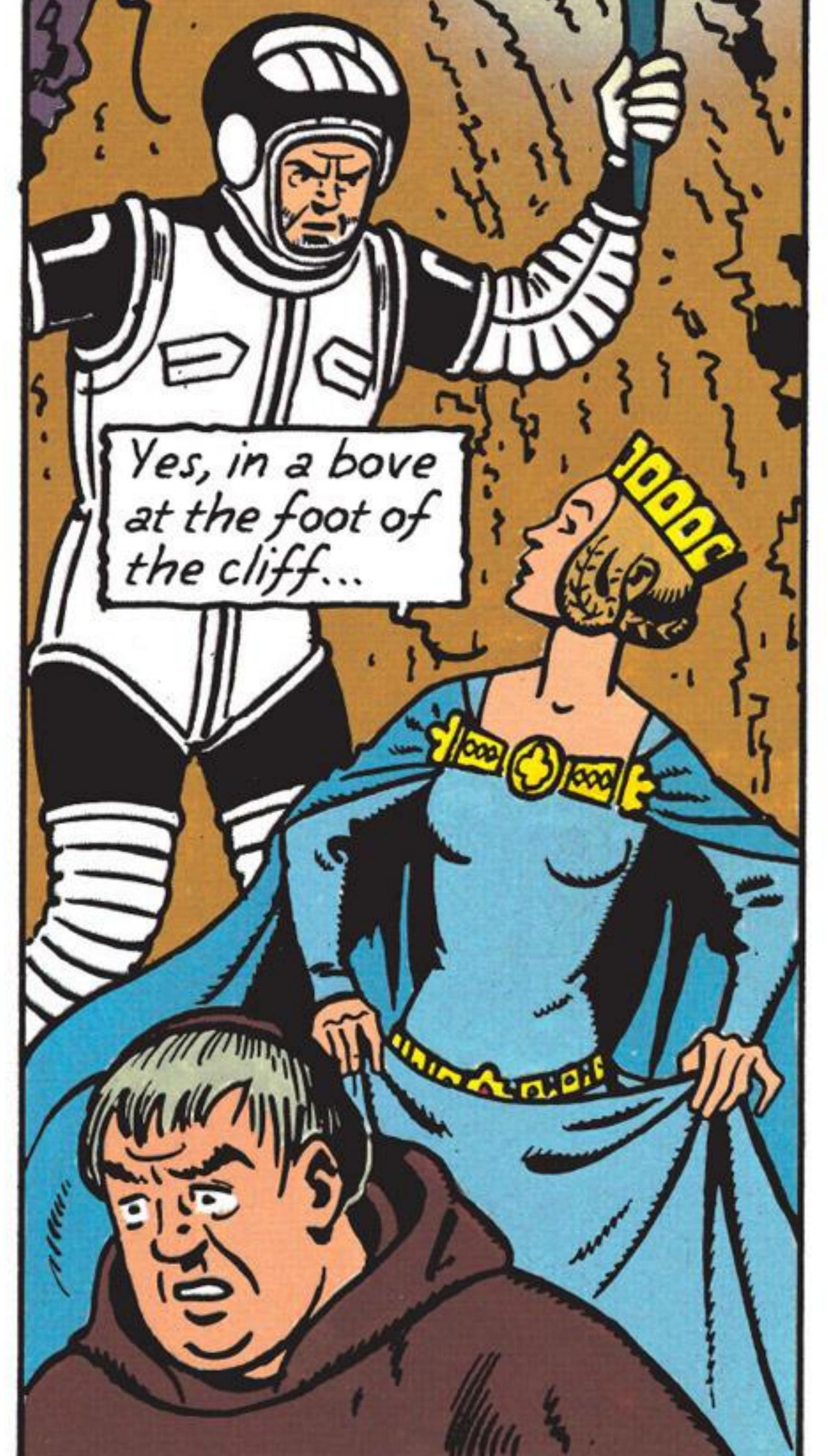


THE THREE MAKE THEIR WAY DOWN THE LONG STAIRCASE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE...



Hurry!... The entrance didn't close – they'll be right behind us.

Is there an exit at the bottom?



Yes, in a bove at the foot of the cliff...

WHEN AT LAST THEY REACH THE CRYPT, MORTIMER STOPS...



This way, sir. Come...

No... This is where we must part ways, as I have other means of leaving this place... Take the torch.

AND DESPITE THEIR URGING, MORTIMER BIDS HIS COMPANIONS FAREWELL...



You are a strange man... Thank you, and adieu. I will never forget you.

Goodbye, my son, and may the Lord watch over you...

Goodbye, Agnes... Goodbye, Father... Look after her... Now run – and don't look back.

ALONE, MORTIMER SPRINTS TO THE CHRONOSCAPHE...



Blast it! Here they come!!!

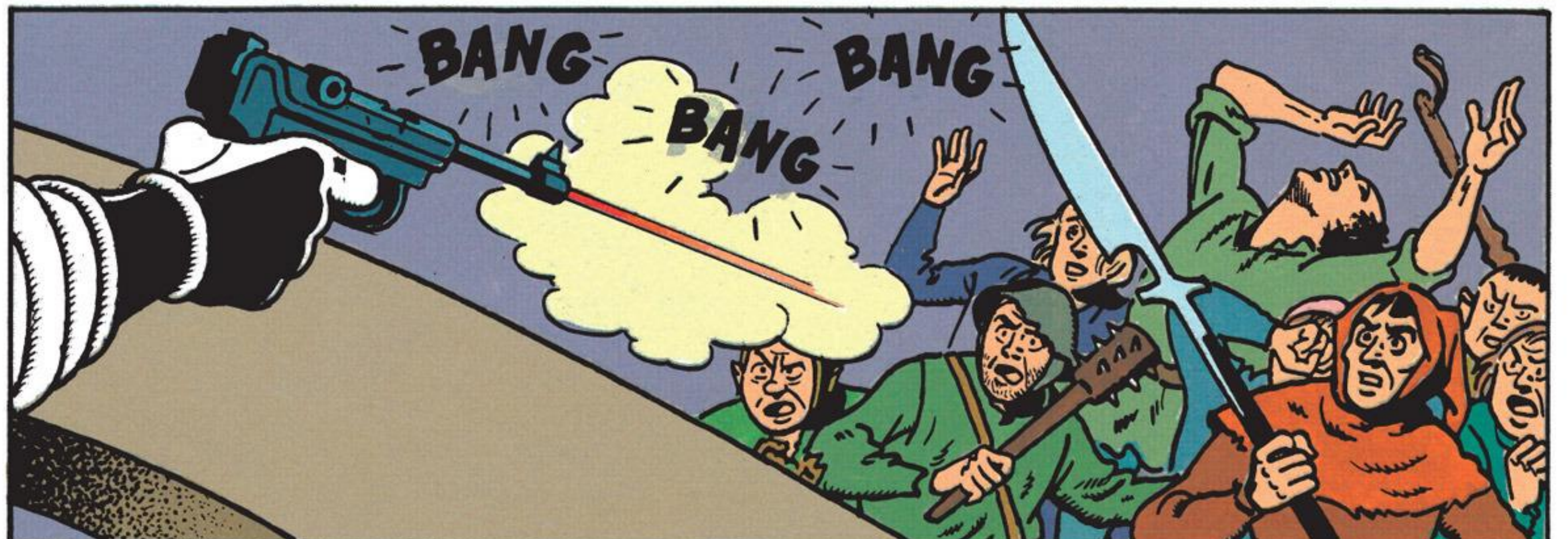
...AND JUMPS INTO THE MACHINE. BUT HE DOESN'T HAVE TIME TO CLOSE THE COCKPIT, AS JUST THEN...



There he is!!

We've got him!!

GRABBING THE PISTOL LEFT ON THE SEAT, THE PROFESSOR EMPTIES IT ON THE SCREAMING HORDE, WHICH FALLS BACK IN DISARRAY...



...THEN, WITH A TERRIFYING WHISTLING, HE QUICKLY VANISHES.



Holy Mother!

I told you he was a sorcerer!... A red-bearded devil!...

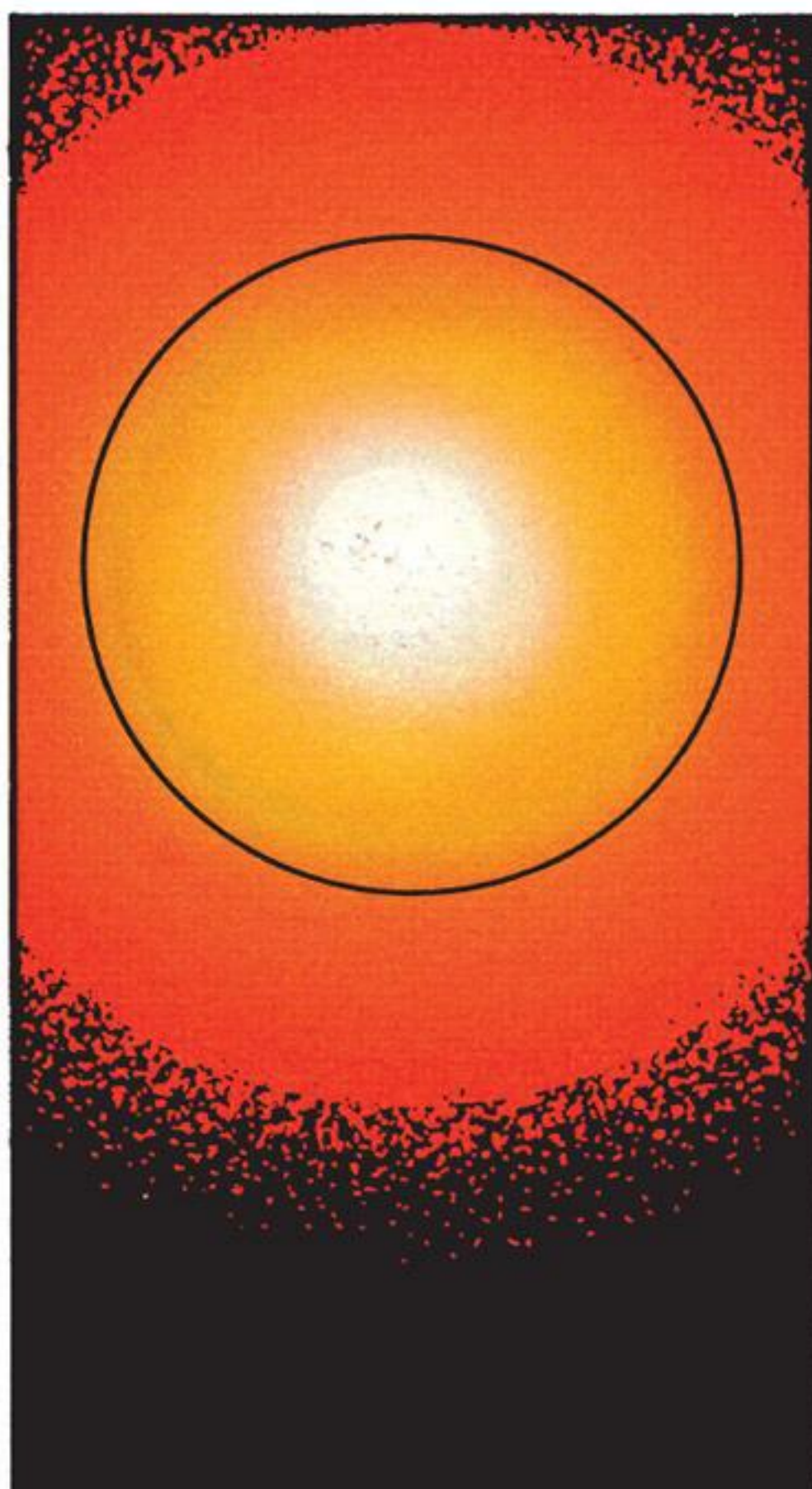
My God!

E.P. Jacobs 22

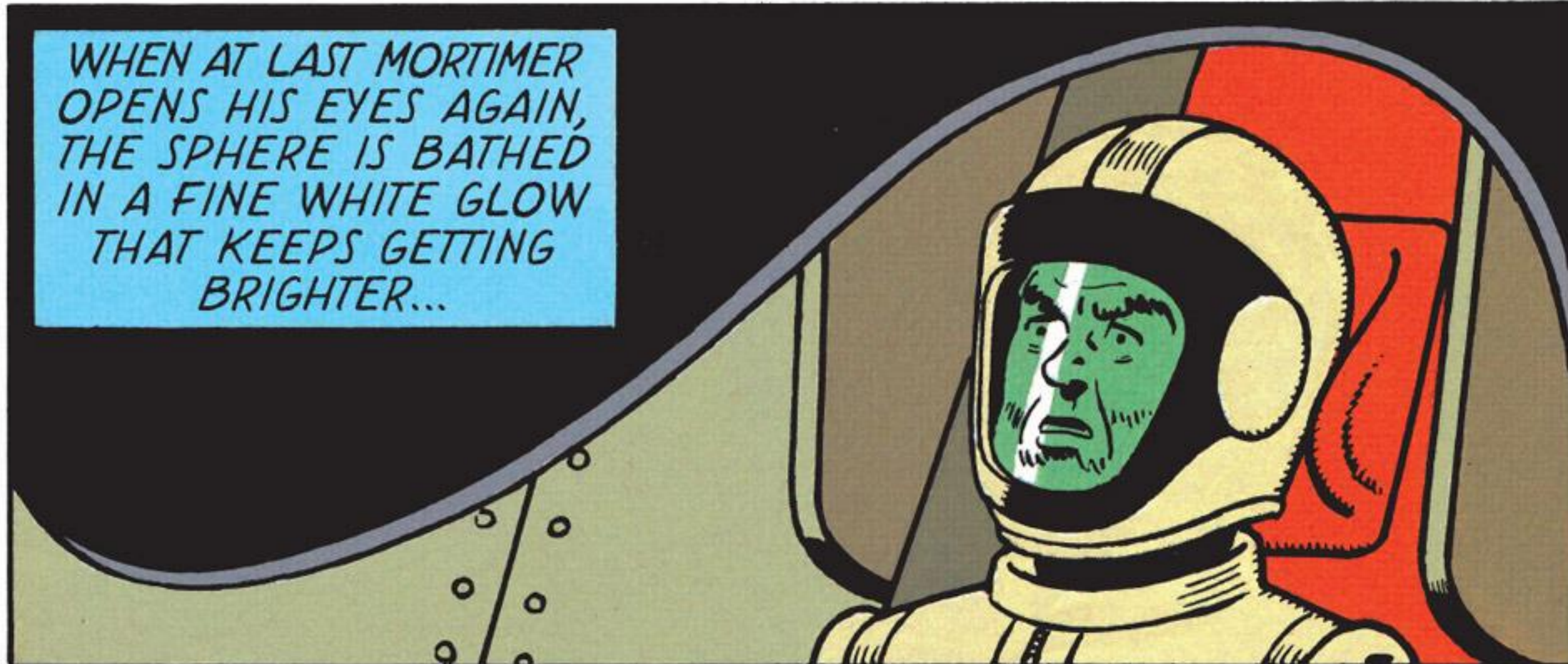
MORTIMER HAS NARROWLY ESCAPED THE FURY OF THE 14TH CENTURY. BUT IN HIS HASTE, HE PUSHED THE CONTROLS AT RANDOM AND, ONCE MORE, THE BRUTAL ACCELERATION IS CRUSHING HIM ONTO HIS SEAT...



THE LIGHT OF THE SPECTROGRAPH, WHICH HAD STARTED A BRIGHT RED, QUICKLY TURNS ORANGE, THEN GRADUALLY CHANGES FROM GOLD TO PALE YELLOW...



WHEN AT LAST MORTIMER OPENS HIS EYES AGAIN, THE SPHERE IS BATHED IN A FINE WHITE GLOW THAT KEEPS GETTING BRIGHTER...



BUT EVEN AS THE LIGHT BECOMES TOO BRIGHT TO SEE, STRANGE PHENOMENA START AFFECTING ITS SOURCE, GIVING THE IMPRESSION THAT THE MACHINE IS SLOWING DOWN...



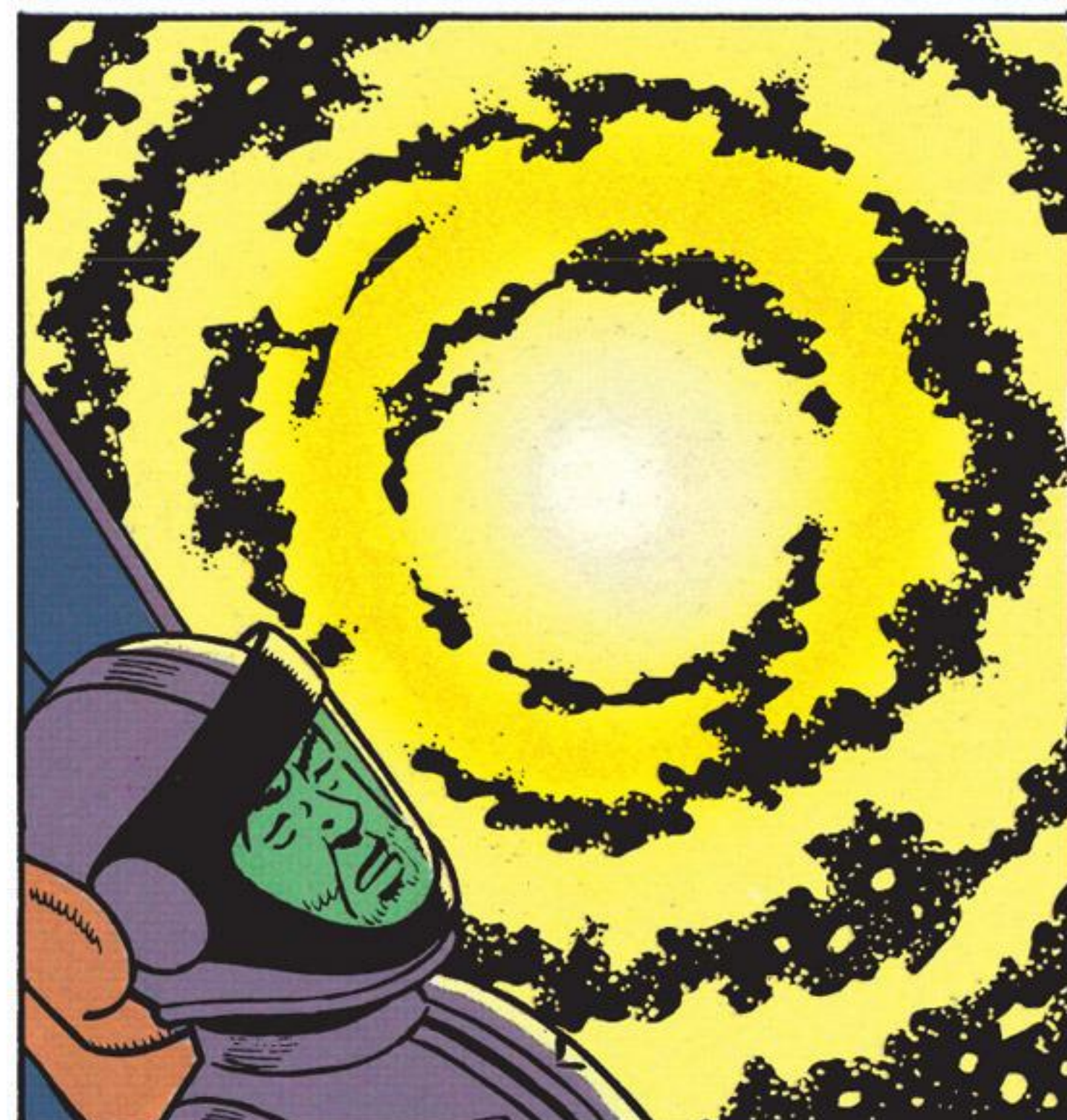
...THEN SUDDENLY, WITH A SHRILL WHISTLING, HE HEARS THE SOUND OF MILOSH'S SCREAMING VOICE...



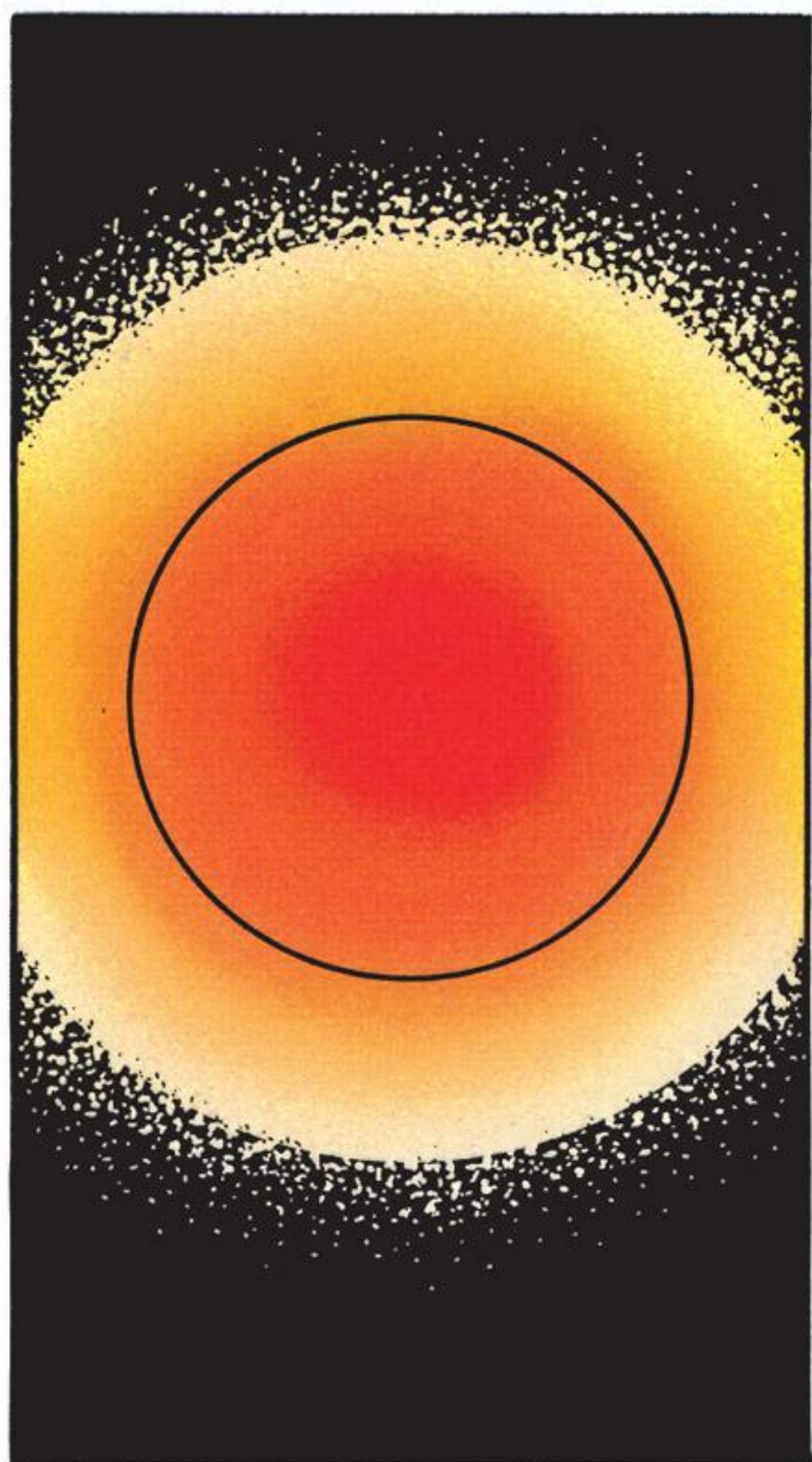
IMMEDIATELY AFTERWARDS, FOR A FLEETING INSTANT, HE SEES HIMSELF AS A SORT OF SPECTRE ENTERING THE CHRONOSCAPHE!



THEN THE MACHINE SEEMS TO PICK UP SPEED AGAIN AND, AS ON HIS FIRST JOURNEY, MORTIMER IS KNOCKED OUT BY A WHIRLWIND OF UNKNOWN SOUNDS...



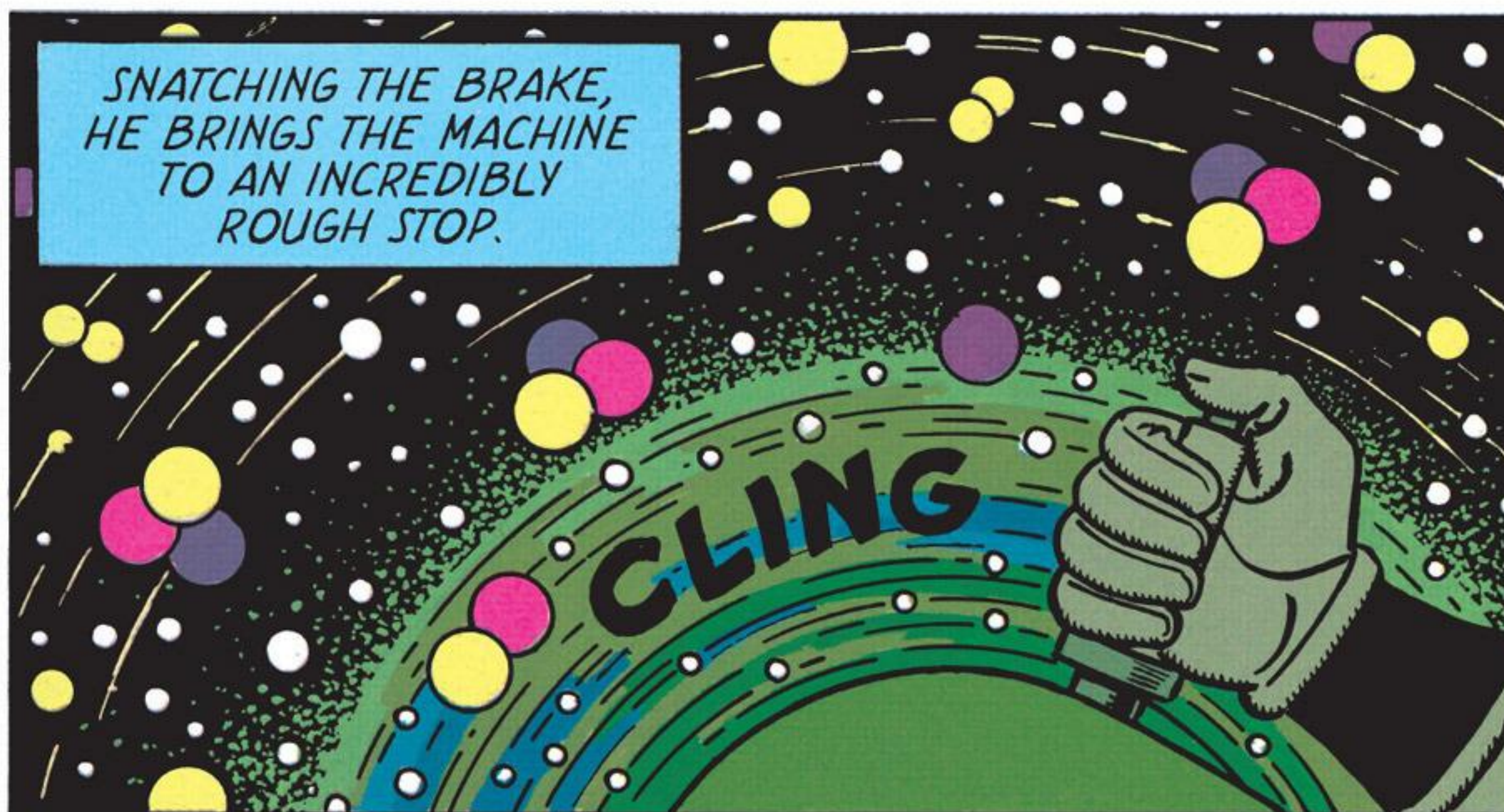
...WHILE THE SPECTROGRAPH RESUMES ITS DIZZYING RACE: YELLOW! ORANGE! RED!



WHEN, AFTER AN UNKNOWN AMOUNT OF TIME, THE PROFESSOR COMES TO, THE COCKPIT FEELS LIKE AN AQUARIUM...



SNATCHING THE BRAKE, HE BRINGS THE MACHINE TO AN INCREDIBLY ROUGH STOP.



AND A MOMENT LATER...



YES, MORTIMER IS BACK IN THE CRYPT, BUT THERE'S NO TRACE OF MILOSH'S LABORATORY! INSTEAD, FALLEN ROCKS AND CONFUSING BITS OF WRECKAGE LAY STREWN AROUND THE MASSIVE PILLARS.



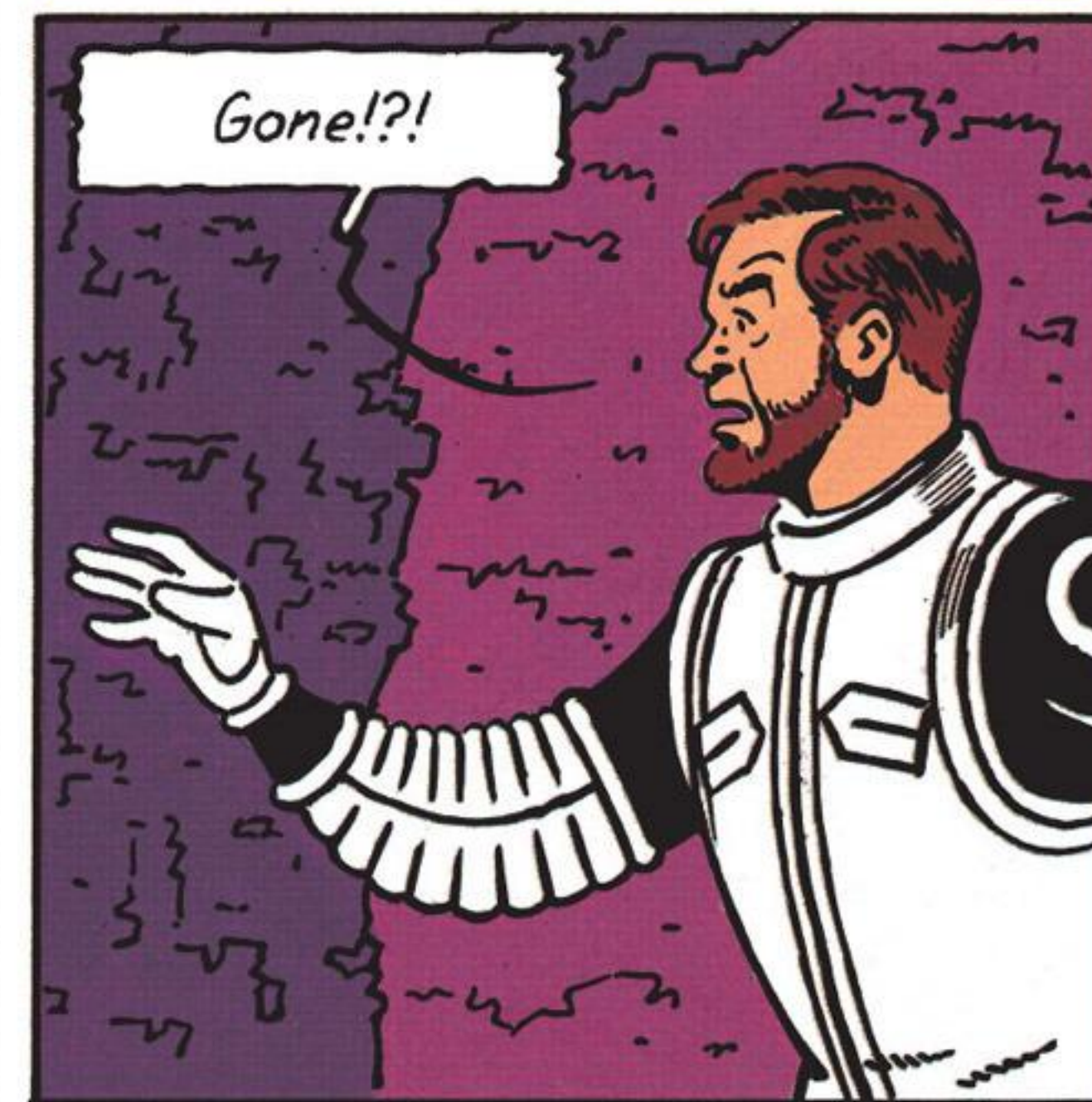
No doubt about it: I've missed my time period again!

HE HURRIES TO THE SECRET DOOR THROUGH WHICH AGNES FLED MERE MOMENTS AGO, BUT...



Nothing!

THEN HE RUNS TO THE KEEP'S STAIRS...



Gone!?!

It makes no sense!... But ... where the devil is that strange light coming from!?

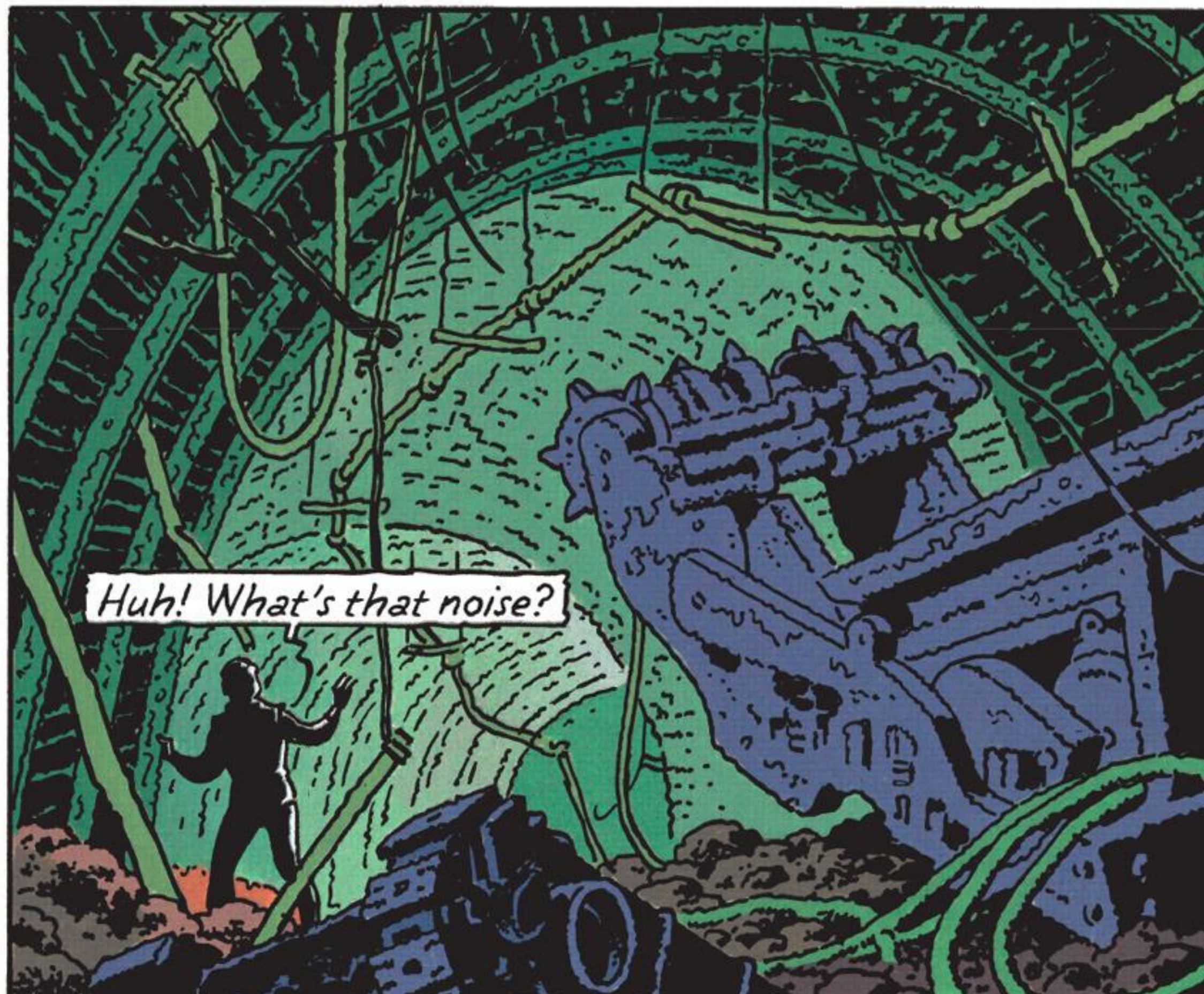


HEADING THAT WAY, HE'S STARTLED TO FIND THE BEGINNING OF AN UNFINISHED RAMP. THE CEILING HAS BEEN COVERED WITH A PARTIALLY RUINED LUMINESCENT COATING THAT GIVES OFF A GREENISH GLOW!



Good grief! Where am I?

CAREFULLY, HE WALKS UP THE RAMP, WEAVING THROUGH THE DERELICT DRILLING EQUIPMENT THAT LITTERS THE BROKEN GROUND...



Huh! What's that noise?

DID HE DETECT A LOW BEAT, FAR ABOVE HIS HEAD?...



No!... It must be because I haven't eaten in a long time... I'm getting dangerously weak!

BUT NO SOONER HAS HE RESUMED HIS JOURNEY THAN HE COMES TO A HALT BEFORE A WEB OF PIPES SPREADING OUT IN EVERY DIRECTION...



My word! These look like ... pumps!?!...

INCREASINGLY INTRIGUED, MORTIMER FINDS A STEEL STAIRCASE CLIMBING UP THE MASSIVE CONCRETE WALLS THAT STRENGTHEN THE ROCK...



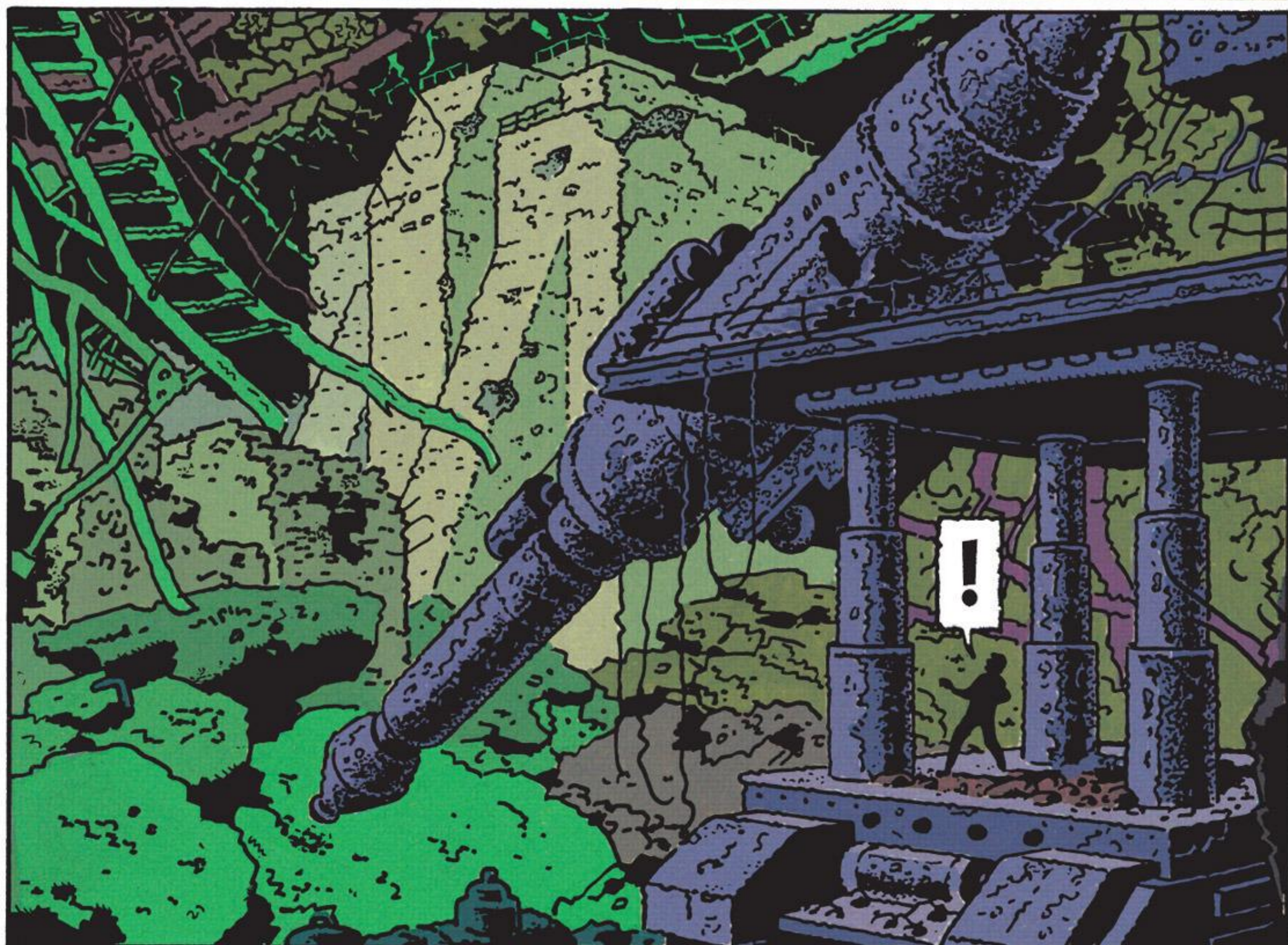
Let's see where this leads!

...AND EVENTUALLY EMERGING AMID A MASS OF TANGLED CABLES...



By Jove!... Surely not!?!...

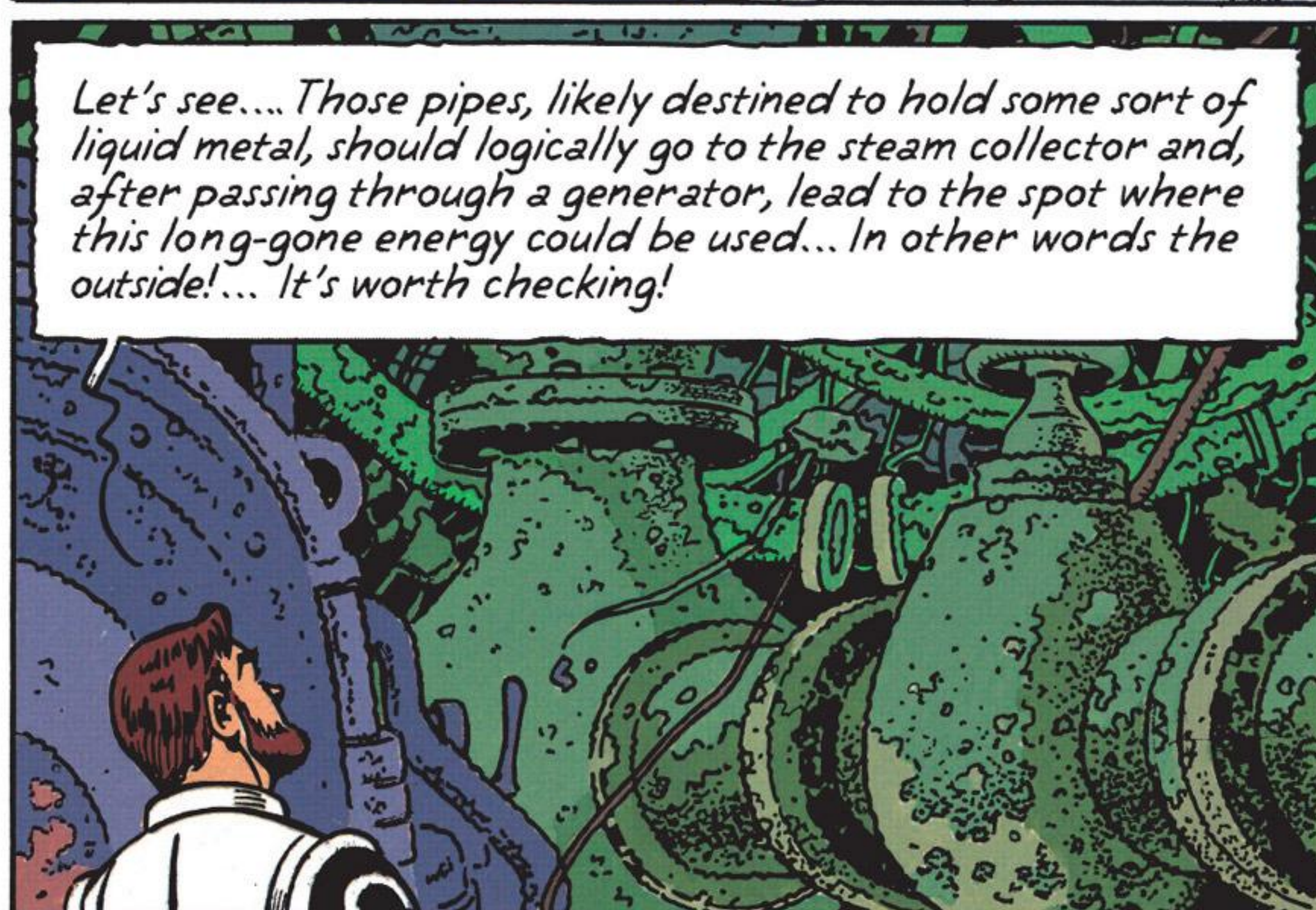
INSIDE THE COLOSSAL HALL BEFORE HIM, MORTIMER HAS JUST RECOGNISED THE REMAINS OF A NUCLEAR PLANT LAID TO RUIN BY SOME DISTANT DISASTER, ALTHOUGH ONE OF ITS ELEMENTS SEEMS ALMOST INTACT...



Strange... Strange! Aside from the gargantuan proportions, this all looks rather similar to what I know ... and yet it seems terribly ancient!?



Let's see.... Those pipes, likely destined to hold some sort of liquid metal, should logically go to the steam collector and, after passing through a generator, lead to the spot where this long-gone energy could be used... In other words the outside!... It's worth checking!



CLIMBING UP AND DOWN, AND STUMBLING OVER THE ACCUMULATED DEBRIS, MORTIMER BEGINS TO FOLLOW THE PIPES. SOON HIS PERSISTENCE IS REWARDED...



Just as I thought – turbines!... But these are enormous!!!

ENCOURAGED, HE GOES ON...



Ah, here are the transformers ... and the high-tension lines!... I'm on the right track!!

SUDDENLY, THOUGH, THE CABLES DISAPPEAR INTO THE GROUND AND THE STARTLED PROFESSOR EMERGES IN A VAST, HALF-COLLAPSED TUNNEL STILL BEARING A SURPRISING INSCRIPTION.



Well, I'll be!... The underground!!!

But what's the meaning of that idiotic spelling?!... I must say, this is most peculiar... Well, I must keep going!

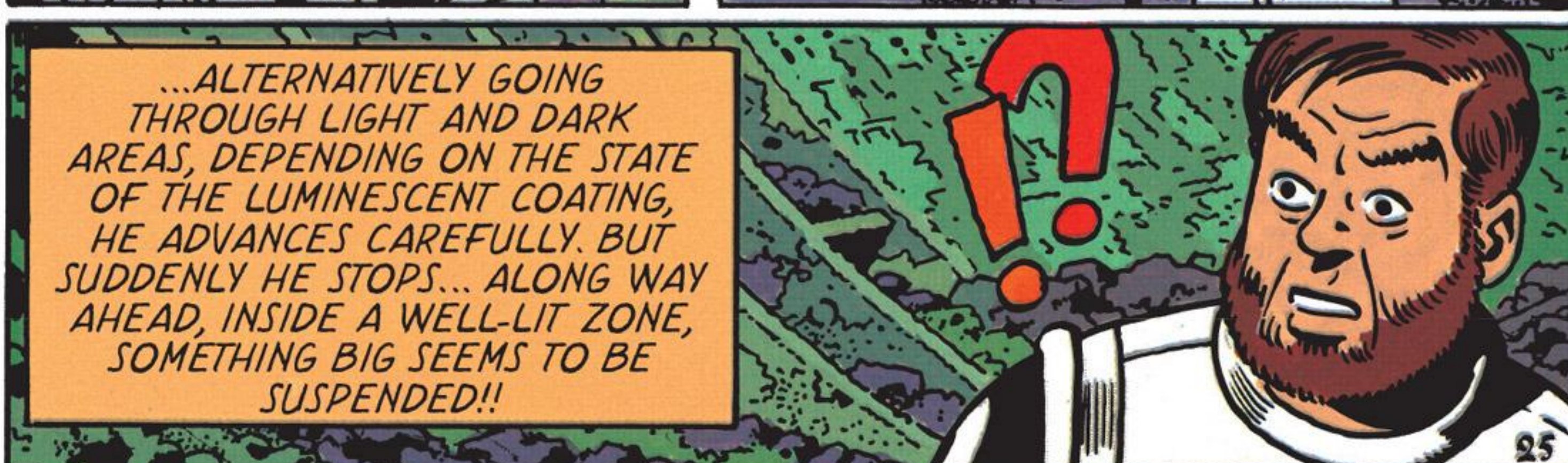


MORE AND MORE UNEASY, MORTIMER DECIDES TO EXPLORE THE TUNNEL...



Where on earth are the rails?...

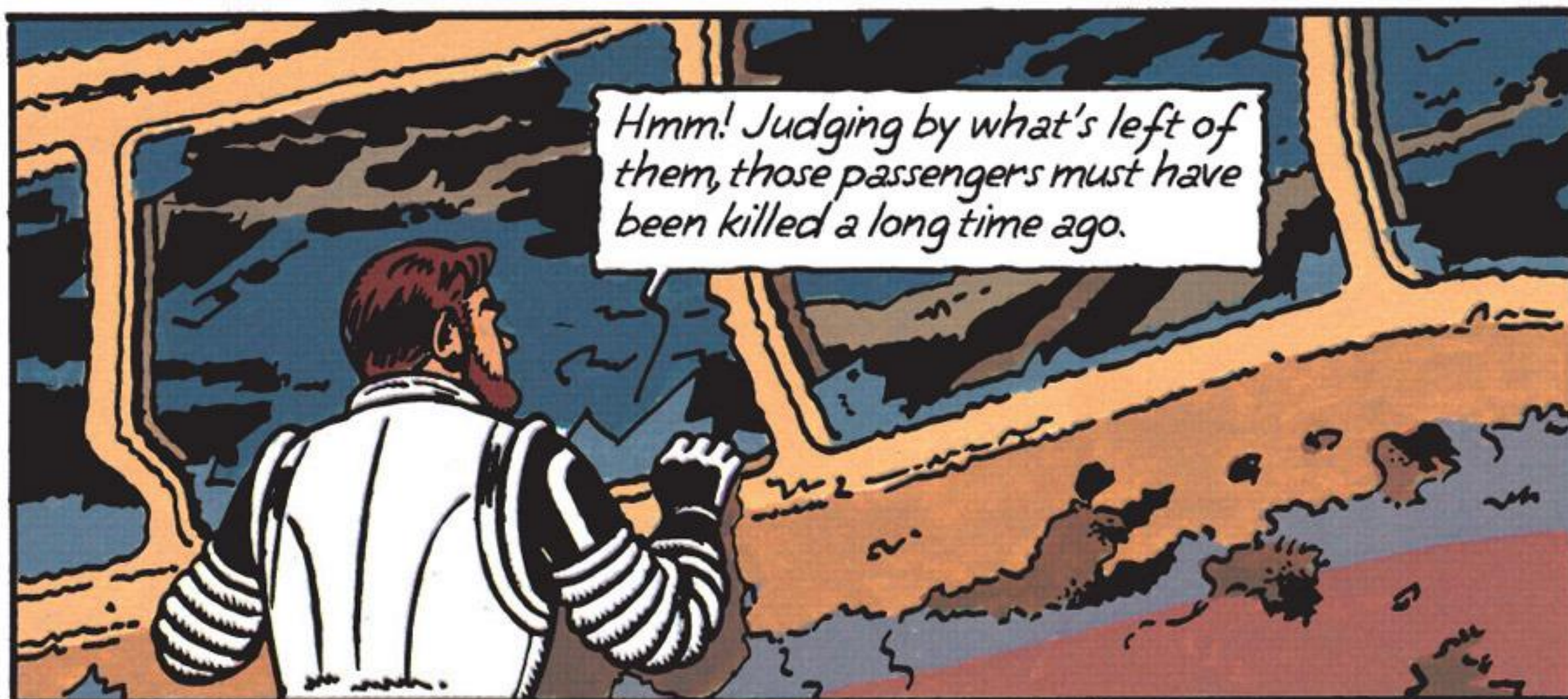
...ALTERNATIVELY GOING THROUGH LIGHT AND DARK AREAS, DEPENDING ON THE STATE OF THE LUMINESCENT COATING, HE ADVANCES CAREFULLY. BUT SUDDENLY HE STOPS... ALONG WAY AHEAD, INSIDE A WELL-LIT ZONE, SOMETHING BIG SEEMS TO BE SUSPENDED!!



COMING CLOSER, THE PROFESSOR IS STUNNED BY AN ASTONISHING SIGHT. IN THE RUINS OF A DEVASTATED STATION, A TWISTED, GUTTED MONORAIL CARRIAGE STILL PARTIALLY HANGS FROM ITS RAIL...



Hmm! Judging by what's left of them, those passengers must have been killed a long time ago.



ILL AT EASE, MORTIMER CASTS A WORRIED GLANCE OVER THE SURROUNDING RUINS...

It's impossible to go any further – the tunnel's collapsed.



HE CLIMBS ONTO THE PLATFORM, WHERE WEAPONS AND BIZARRE DEBRIS ARE STREWN ABOUT THE DUST AND RUBBLE...



A SHORT DISTANCE AWAY, HIS ATTENTION IS DRAWN TO THE RUSTED LIFT SHAFT – THE LIFT ITSELF LYING CRASHED 100 FEET BELOW...

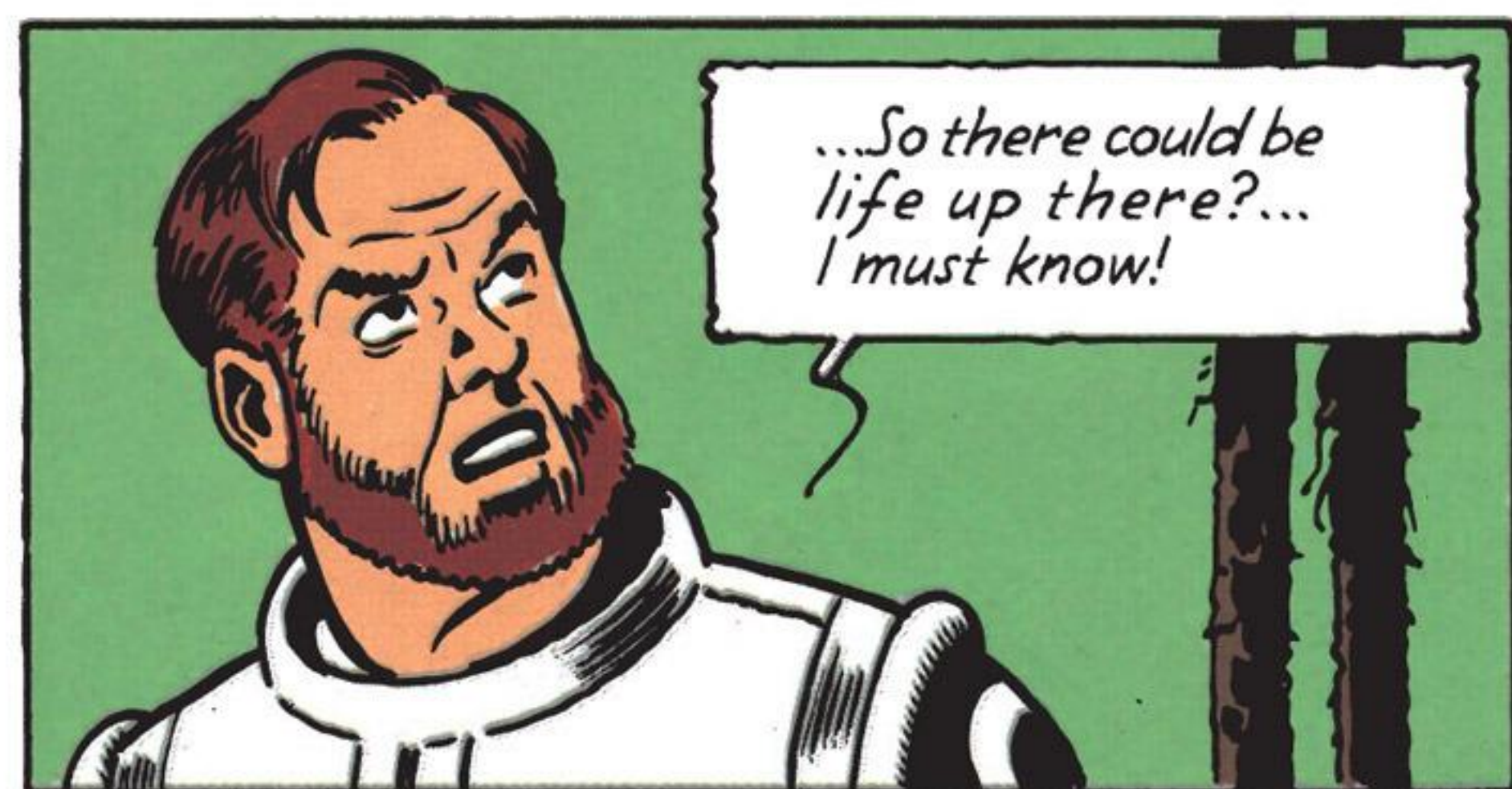


BUT AS HE LEANS FORWARD TO EXAMINE THE CRUMBLING LADDER, OUR FRIEND FREEZES, ATTENTIVE...

Oh!?!... That beat again... This time I'm sure...



...So there could be life up there?... I must know!



WITH EXTREME CARE, MORTIMER BEGINS HIS DANGEROUS ASCENT. AFTER 30 FEET...

A gallery! Blocked as well... Keep going!



BUT AN UNPLEASANT DISCOVERY AWAITS FURTHER UP: SHREDDED BY SOME ANCIENT EXPLOSION, THE LADDER AND THE SHAFT'S STRUCTURE ARE INEXTRICABLY TWISTED TOGETHER, BARRING HIS WAY...

Blast it! I have to get to that gallery, no matter what!



Let's go. Good grief, I hope it holds!!



WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY, THE PROFESSOR MANAGES TO SCRAMBLE THROUGH THE TORN GIRDERS UP TO THE LIFT'S ENTRANCE.



Phew!!!

BUT NO SOONER HAS HE STEPPED OUT OF THE SHAFT THAN HE STOPS, ROOTED IN PLACE...



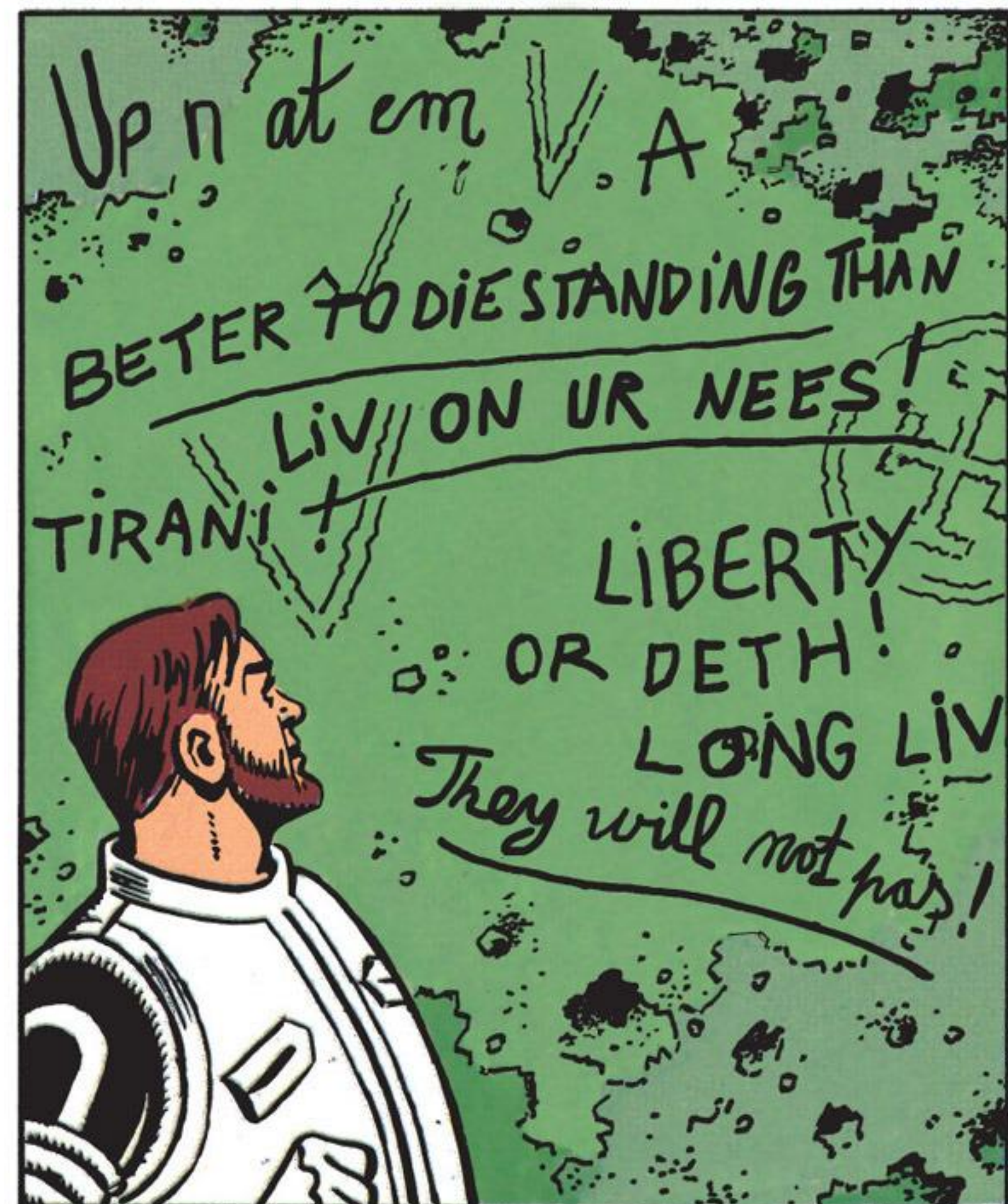
Good Lord!

WHAT HE HAD THOUGHT WAS A GALLERY IS IN FACT A HUGE ROTUNDA FROM WHICH SPREAD NUMEROUS OTHER TUNNELS... BUT HERE MORE THAN ANYWHERE ELSE REMAINS THE EVIDENCE OF FURIOUS FIGHTING...



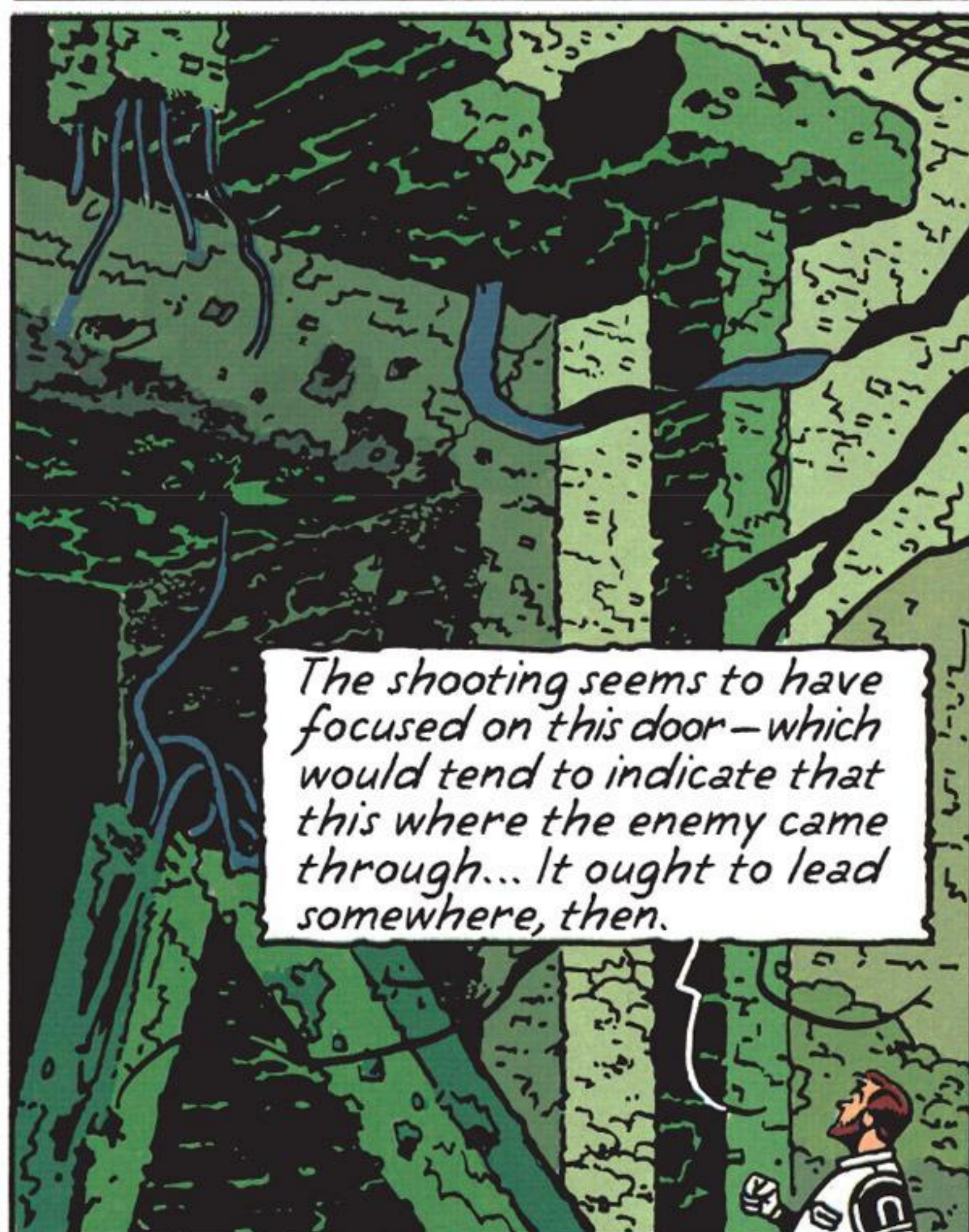
It's an actual battlefield...

READABLE DESPITE THE STRANGENESS OF THE EUPHONIC SPELLING, GRAFFITI LEFT ON THE WALLS UNDERLINES THE BITTERNESS OF THAT LONG-AGO STRUGGLE.



Up n at em V.A
BETER 7O DIE STANDING THAN
LIV ON UR NEES!
TIRANI!
LIBERTY
OR DETH!
LONG LIV
They will not pas!

SHAKING HIMSELF OUT OF IT, MORTIMER RESUMES HIS TREK...



The shooting seems to have focused on this door - which would tend to indicate that this where the enemy came through... It ought to lead somewhere, then.

HE ENTERS A GALLERY BORDERED BY GAPING OPENINGS AND OCCASIONALLY RUNNING ACROSS OTHER IDENTICAL GALLERIES. THE TUNNEL, STRETCHING AHEAD WITH NO END IN SIGHT, TAKES MORTIMER THROUGH A VAST TROGLODYTE CITY...



This can only be a nuclear shelter for some administrative complex...

Actually... Maybe one of those offices still contains a plan or some directions! Let's check...



ALAS! EACH ROOM HOLDS NOTHING BUT ASH, RUBBLE AND UNIDENTIFIED CHARRED OBJECTS...



Blast! It looks like the whole place was cleared with a flamethrower.

...IN VAIN MORTIMER PERSISTS IN HIS SEARCH - EVERYWHERE IT'S THE SAME VISION OF DESOLATION...



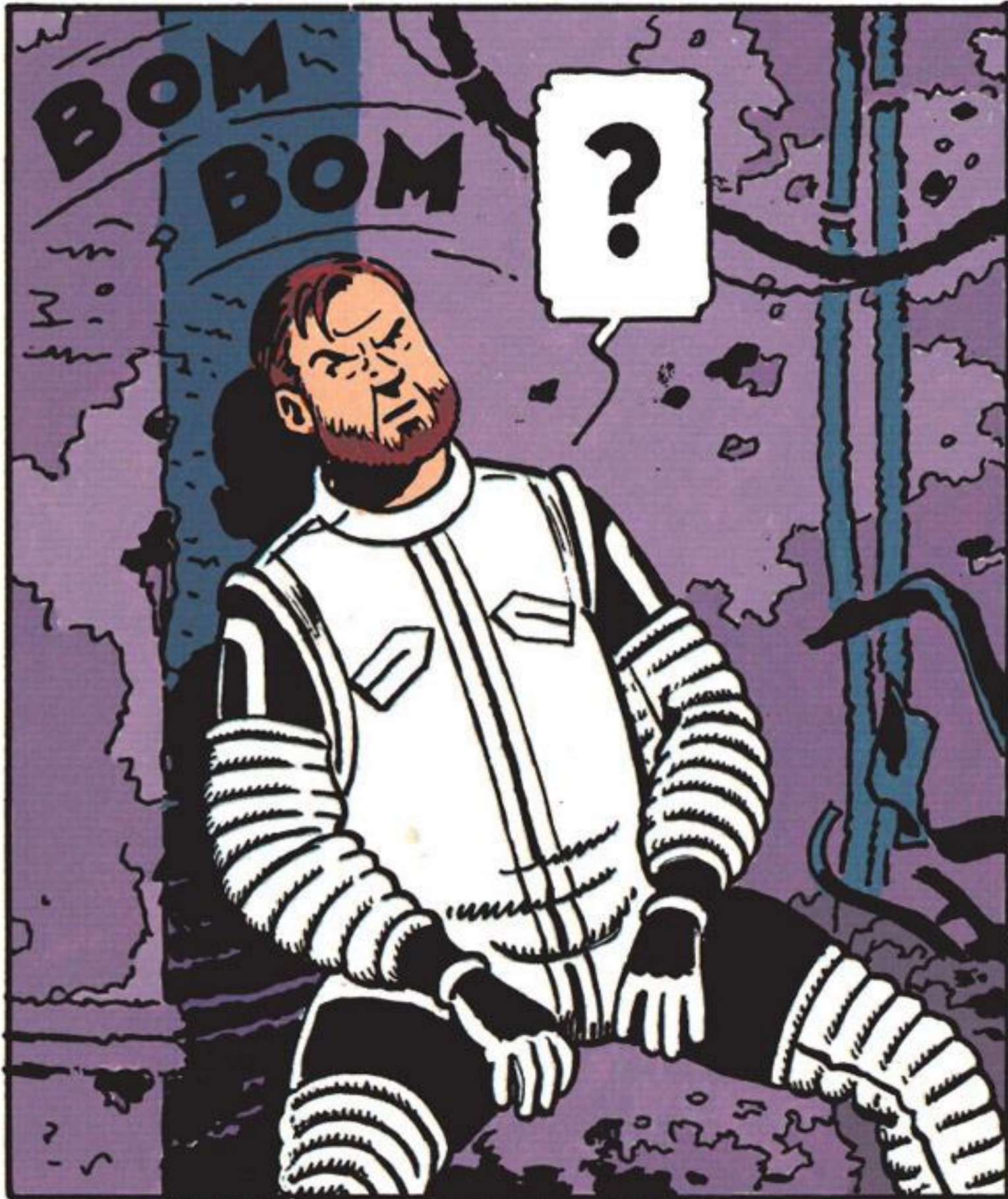
Nothing! Still nothing!!

IN THE END, THE MONOTONOUS HORROR EVENTUALLY OVERCOMES OUR FRIEND'S RESISTANCE. UNDER THE COMBINED EFFECTS OF HUNGER, THIRST AND WEARINESS, HE SUDDENLY FEELS LIGHT-HEADED...

I'm exhausted!... I have to get out of this infernal labyrinth!!



WORN OUT, MORTIMER SITS DOWN HEAVILY ON A CONCRETE BLOCK.



BUT HE IS IMMEDIATELY BACK ON HIS FEET, AS HE HAS JUST HEARD THE BEAT HE PERCEIVED BEFORE, CLEARLY ECHOING THROUGH THE WALLS!



HEARTENED, MORTIMER CONTINUES HIS TRIP, CHECKING ON THE DIRECTION EVERY SO OFTEN.



HE SOON REACHES THE BOTTOM OF A WIDE, ANCIENT STAIRCASE...



ALTHOUGH HE'S BEGUN RUSHING UPSTAIRS, HIS JOY IS SHORT-LIVED: A MASSIVE WALL BLOCKS THE WAY!



Well, now's not the time to give up. There are bound to be other exits... Back the other way!!!



MORTIMER CONTINUES EXPLORING GALLERY AFTER SIMILAR GALLERY...



BUT THERE AS WELL HE FINDS THE SAME IMPASSABLE OBSTACLE!



INCREASINGLY FRANTIC, MORTIMER BEGINS RUNNING FROM STAIRCASE TO STAIRCASE...



...BUT EVERY SINGLE ONE IS SEALED!



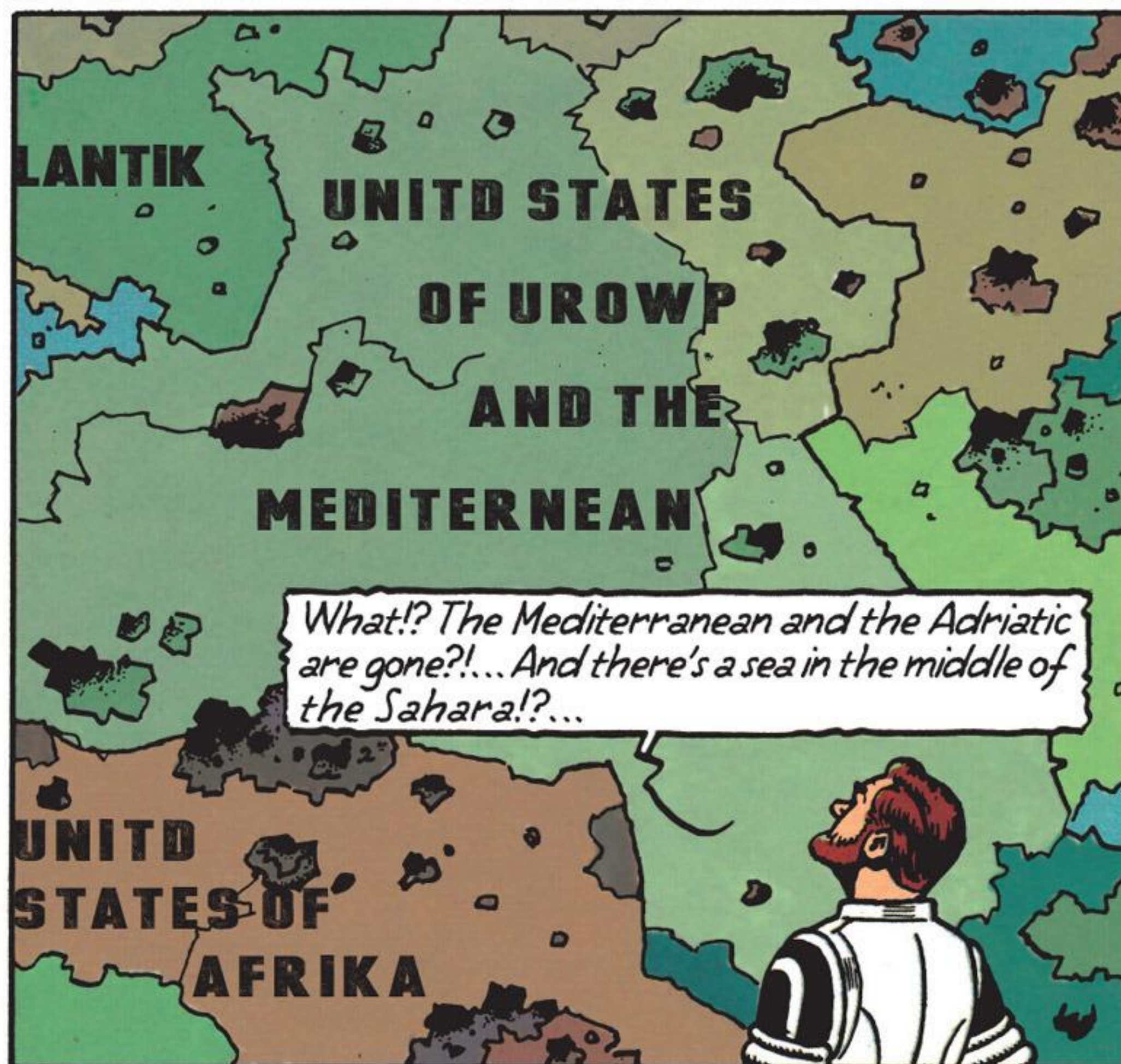
UNTIL SUDDENLY, AS HE IS ABOUT TO BE OVERWHELMED BY PANIC, COMES THE IMPROBABLE MIRACLE!



FULL OF HOPE, MORTIMER SPRINTS AHEAD. ALAS, IT'S YET ANOTHER ROOM, ITS WALLS DECORATED WITH HALF-ERODED FREScoes. IN THE MIDDLE STANDS A STRANGE ABSTRACT MONUMENT. EVERYWHERE SMASHED DISPLAYS CONTAIN FRAGMENTS OF UNIDENTIFIABLE OBJECTS BURIED IN THE DUST...



A MAP OF EUROPE COVERING A WHOLE PANEL FILLS HIM WITH WONDER.



TRANSFERRING HIS GAZE TO THE CENTRAL MONUMENT, HE LETS OUT A SURPRISED CRY...



COMING CLOSER, HE FINDS THE ASTONISHING INSCRIPTION:



By Jove! I'm in the 21st century now?! Blasted Milosh! How am I going to escape his infernal trap?



BUT SO CLOSE NOW, THE PULSING SOUND, LIKE THE BEAT OF A MONSTROUS HEART, INTERRUPTS HIS TRAIN OF THOUGHTS...



DASHING INSIDE, THE PROFESSOR IS FORCED TO STOP ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, TANGLED UP TO HIS KNEES IN AN ENORMOUS PILE OF FILM AND MAGNETIC STRIPS. THE ROOM HAS A STRANGE ACOUSTIC AND IS COVERED BY A DOME EMITTING A MYSTERIOUS BLUE LIGHT...



Microfilms! Visual and audio records! What could they be?



BUT AS HE STANDS NEAR THE WALL, UNMOVING, A VOICE THAT SEEMS TO COME OUT OF ONE OF THE LARGE BUTTRESSES THAT FRAME THE ROOM WHISPERS IN HIS EAR...



Yes, Your Highness. Focas is at the heart of the plot...

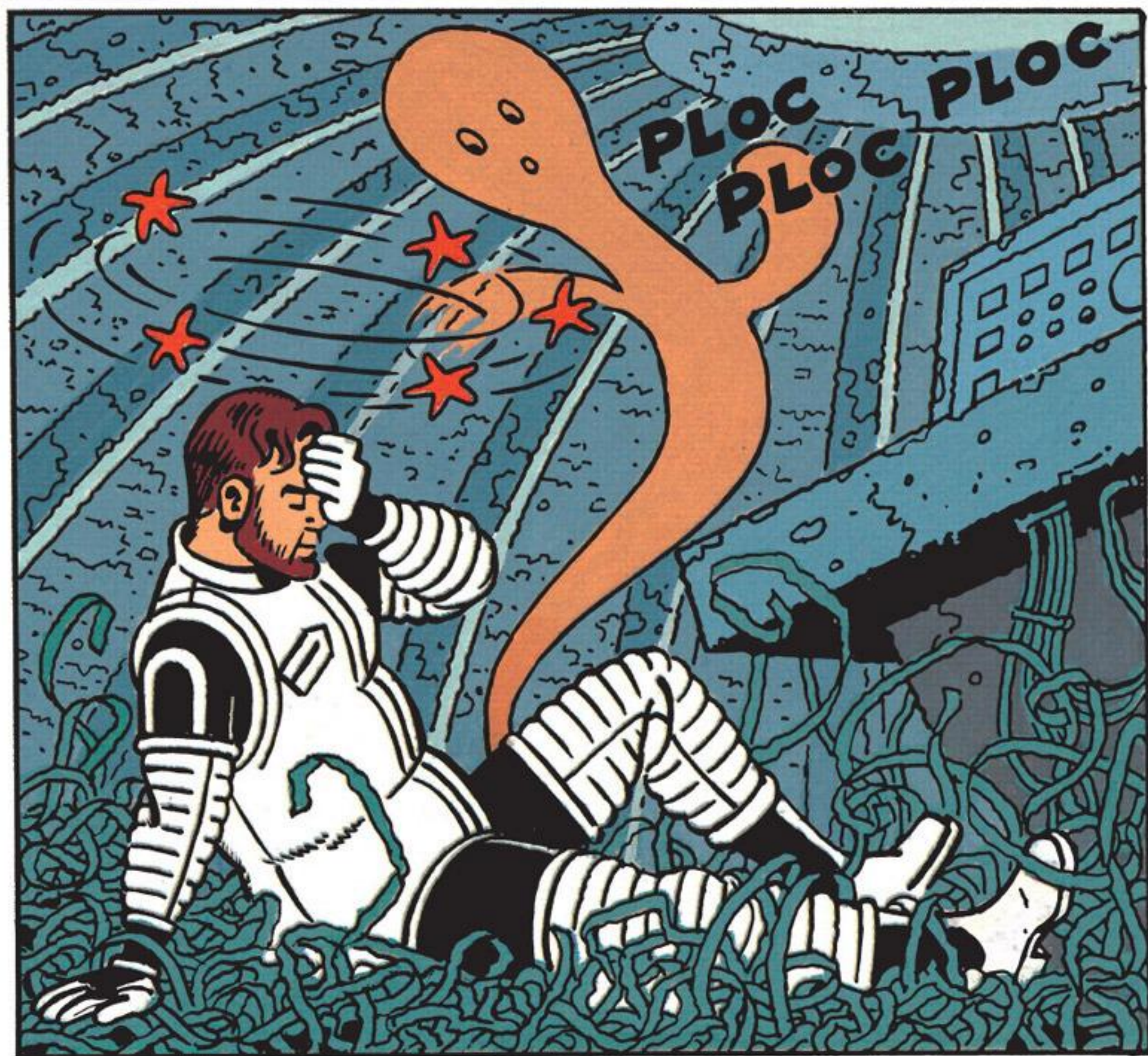
TAKEN BY SURPRISE, THE PROFESSOR DOESN'T PAUSE TO THINK. HE LEAPS FORWARD, SHOUTING...



BUT HIS FEET ARE CAUGHT IN THE GREAT MESS OF STRIPS THAT COVERS THE GROUND; HE STUMBLES ONTO AN OLD CONTROL PANEL...



...AND COLLAPSES, STUNNED, WHILE ABOVE HIM ON THE TRANSLUCENT SLAB, FOOTSTEPS HURRY AWAY...



AT THAT MOMENT, THE DEAFENING SOUNDS OF A MILITARY FANFARE BLARE OUT, AND A SORT OF ECTOPLASM APPEARS, SUSPENDED IN MID-AIR. STRETCHING, IT SOON TURNS INTO A MAN IN A FORMAL SUIT, STRIKING A SOLEMN, PATRIOTIC POSE!



IN A DISTORTED VOICE, THE STRANGE SPECTRE BEGINS A TEMPESTUOUS SPEECH PUNCTUATED BY ODD NOISES...

Citizens of this nation ... Arf-arf-woof!... Crrrack!... As I stand before you I say Woof-woof! Crrrack!... We may have lost a Bloof-bloof-woof!... But not the Splatsh-nyoof... Crrrack!... Our defence in depth...



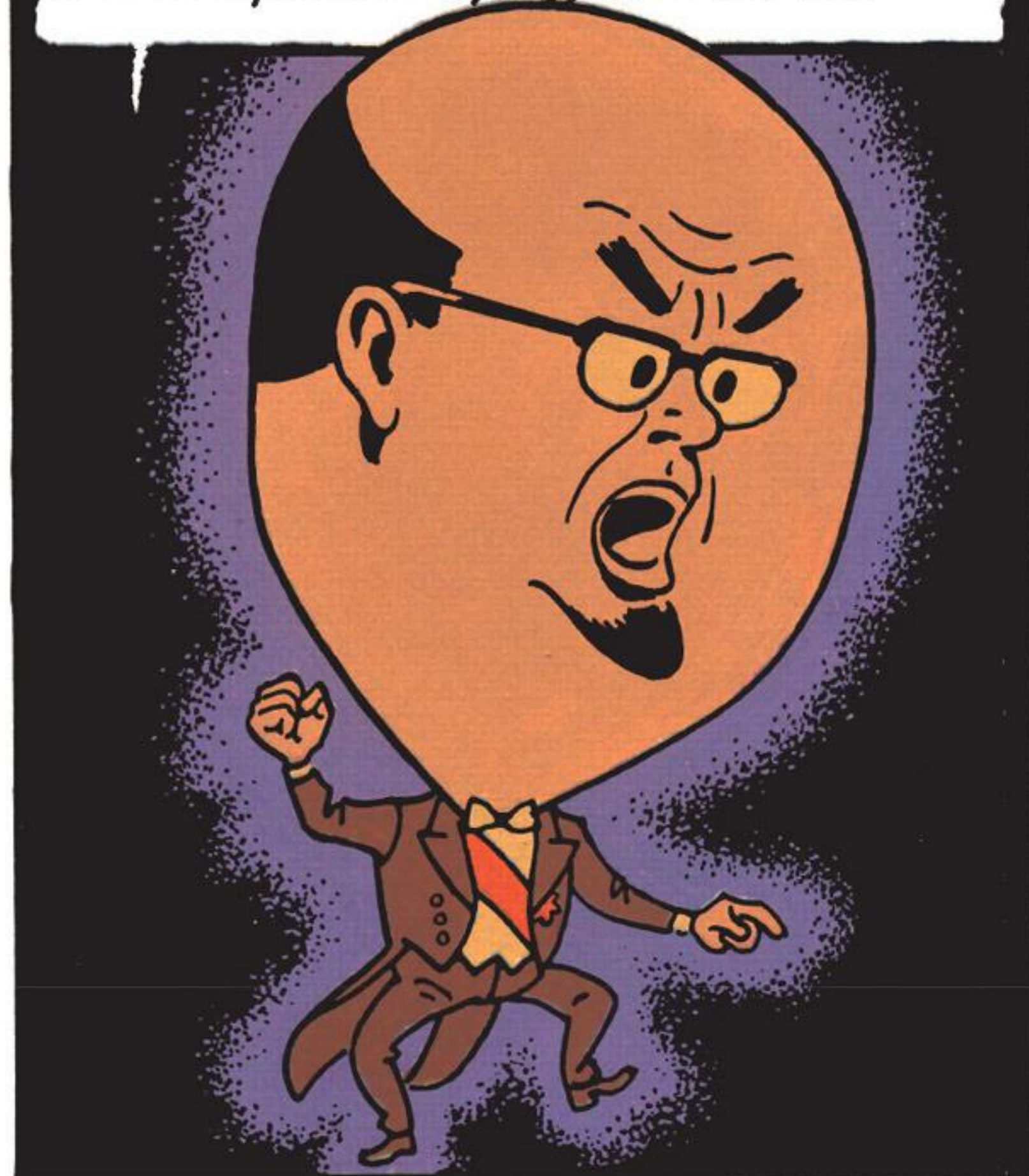
BUT NOW THE SPEAKER'S HEAD VANISHES - ALTHOUGH HE DOESN'T STOP TALKING!!!!

...Our military potential is Kritsh-kritsh-crrrack! As our desperate enemy is throwing his last Nyooof-nyoof-blatsch!...



...ONLY TO REAPPEAR - EXCESSIVELY LARGE!!!

...Look to the future with Bloof-bloof-woof... We shall be victorious because we are the Splatsh-nyoof... Craaack!



THEN, AS THE APPARITION BECOMES GROTESQUELY MISSHAPEN, A VAST COMPANY OF ARMED TROOPS APPEARS TO THE SOUND OF A BOOMING CHOIR AND ADVANCES TOWARDS MORTIMER AS IF TO TRAMPLE HIM!!!

Forward, citizens!!! This war is the Las-las-splatsh!... March behind your Gloop... Long live the Republic! Long live Crrrack!...



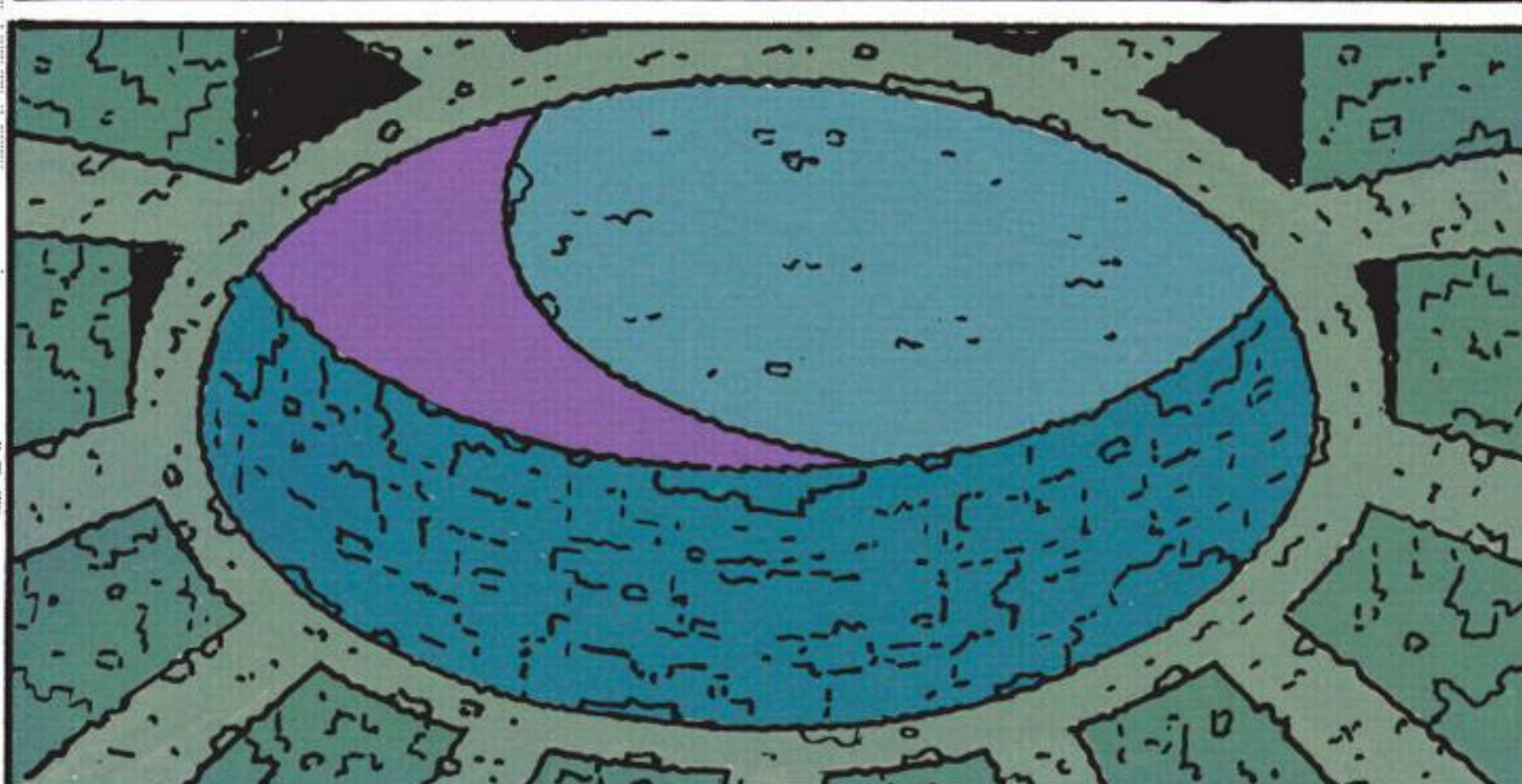
COMPLETELY UNSETTLED BY THE INCREDIBLE SCENE, MORTIMER – WHO HAD SIMPLY TRIGGERED THE PROJECTION OF AN OLD STEREOSCOPIC FILM – FINALLY SUCCUMBS TO THE ACCUMULATED STRESS OF THE PAST FEW HOURS...



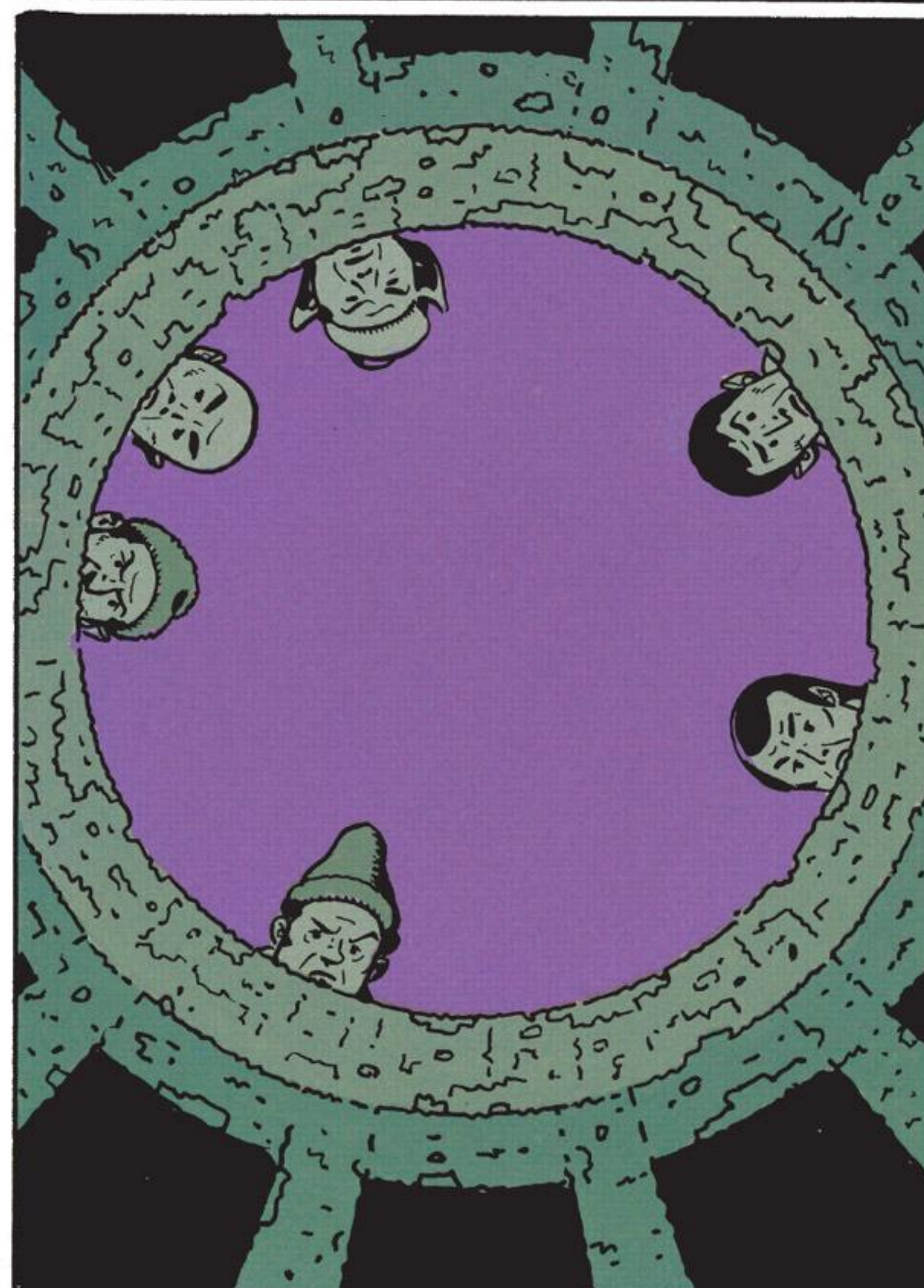
BUT BEFORE LOSING CONSCIOUSNESS, HIS WEARY EYES SEEM TO GLIMPSE...



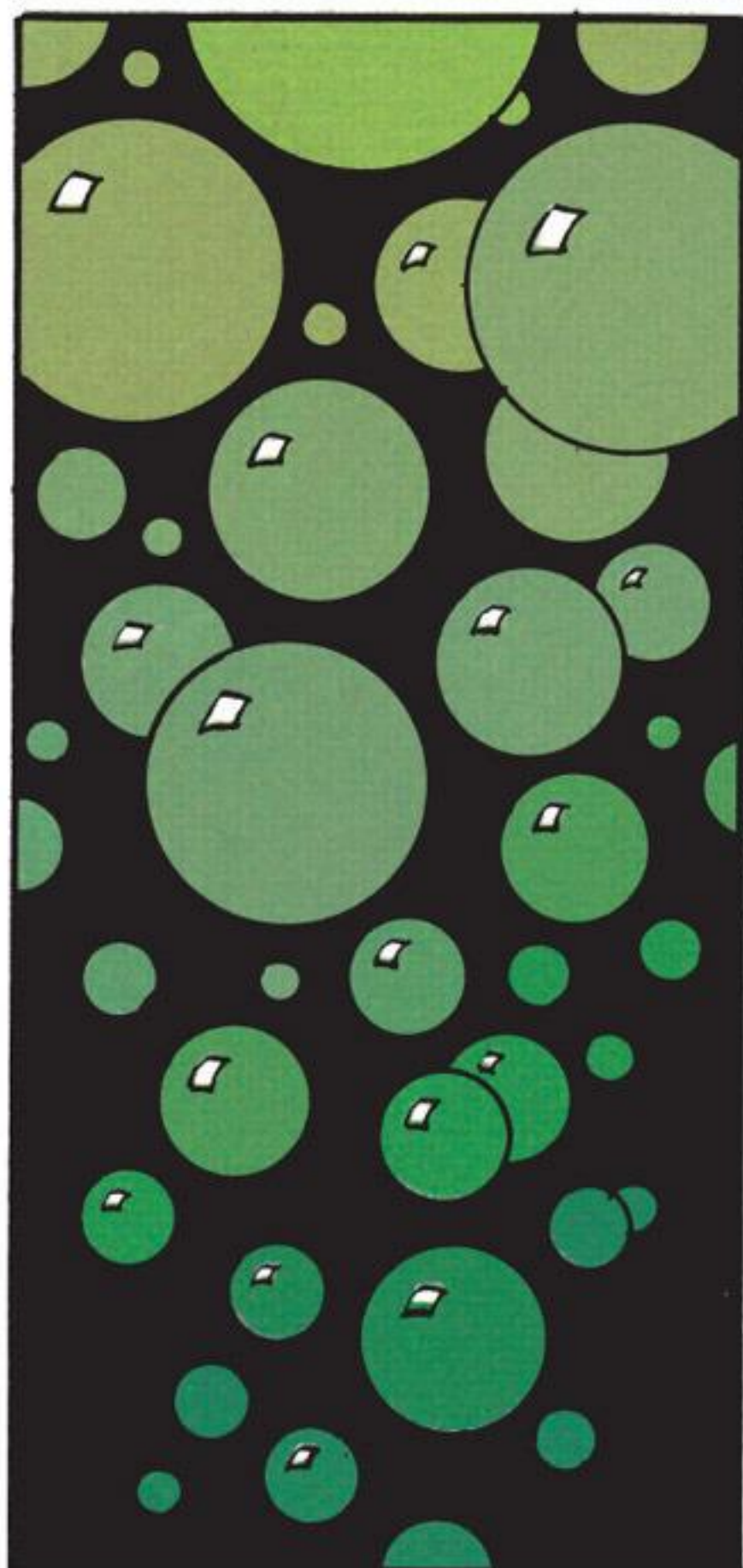
...THE CEILING SLAB SLIDE SLOWLY ASIDE...



...AND THE OPENING SPROUT GRIMACING FACES...



...THEN HE BLACKS OUT!



THIS TIME, THOUGH, HIS SENSES DID NOT BETRAY HIM: HALF A DOZEN FIERCE-LOOKING MEN ARE LEANING OVER THE HOLE.



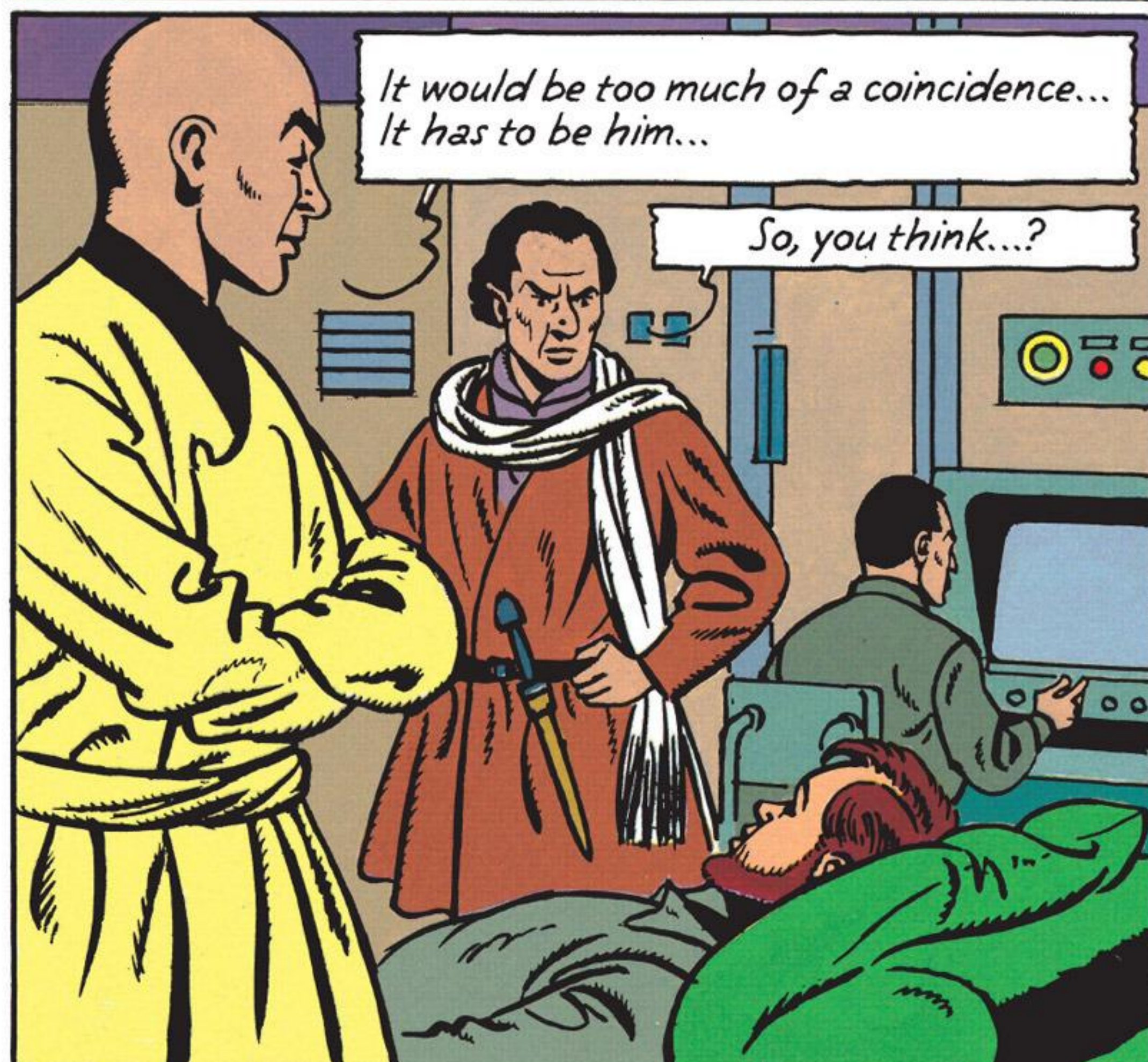
A TALL, MAJESTIC MAN WITH AN AIR OF AUTHORITY HAS APPEARED.



A FEW MINUTES LATER, MORTIMER IS LIFTED TO THE SURFACE... BUT AS THE MEN BUSY THEMSELVES WITH HIM, SOMEONE HIDDEN IN THE SHADOWS IS SPYING ON THE STRANGE PROCESSION THAT CARRIES THE PROFESSOR AWAY...



AN HOUR LATER, THE ONE WHO WAS CALLED 'MASTER' AND A SOMBRE-LOOKING MAN ARE WAITING FOR MORTIMER TO WAKE UP WHILE A THIRD MAN CONSULTS MICROFILMS ON A VIEWER.



BUT THE MAN AT THE VIEWER EXCLAIMS...



ON THE SCREEN IS A FADED DOCUMENT, WRITTEN IN PRE-GRAMMATICAL REFORM ENGLISH...

At any rate, it is clear that Mortimer left a deep mark not only on the scientific history of the end of the 20th century but also in popular imagination. Indeed, while his actual exploits are relatively well known, his reputation later evolved into bizarre myth - making him into a second Dr Faust! For instance, he is said to have explored, in obscure circumstances, the Great Pyramid of Kheops, to have invented a machine called the Telecephaloscope, whose use is something of a mystery, and to have discovered ancient Atlantis. There are even rumours that he experimented with a Chronoscaphé, or time machine! Anyone with knowledge of how advanced science was at the time will realise to what extent Philip Mortimer



Sir Philip Mortimer

There's no longer any doubt... This man is a descendant of that Philip Mortimer, whose great grand nephews emigrated to Pluto so many centuries ago...



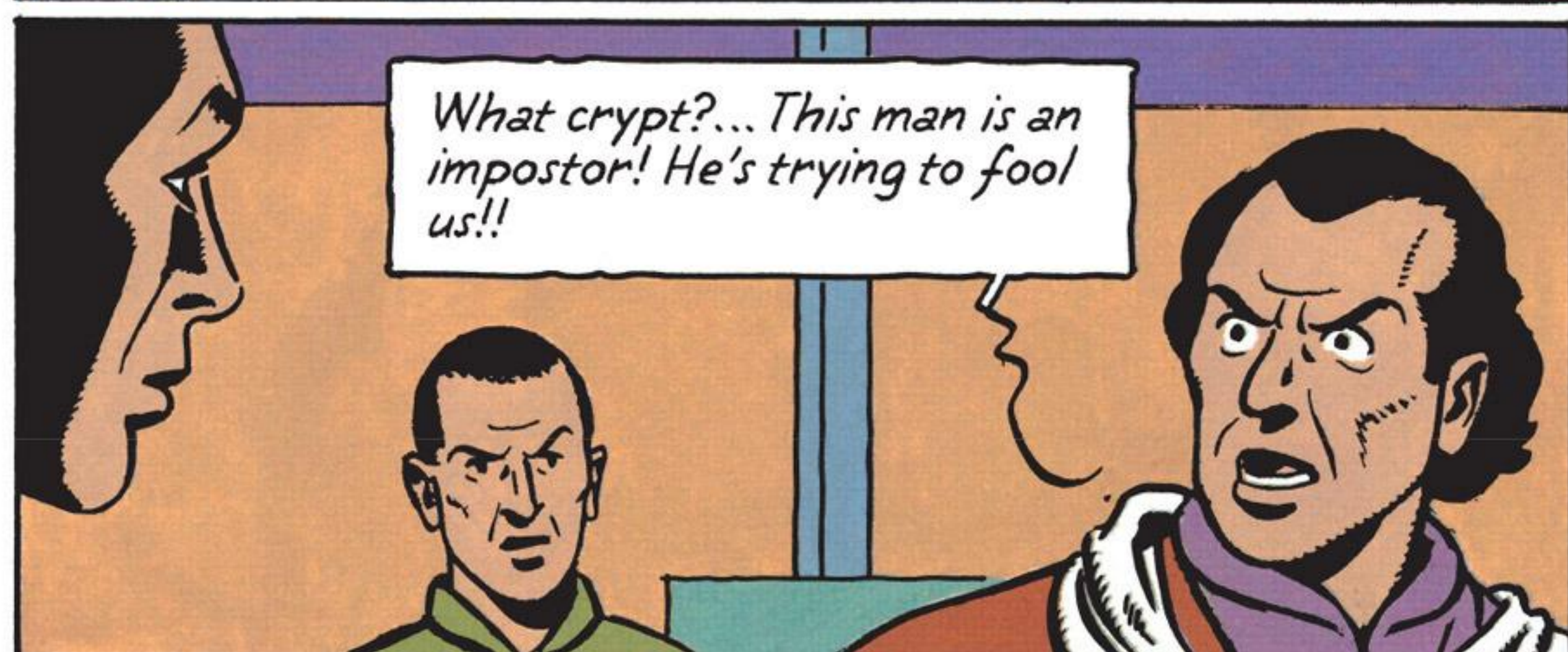
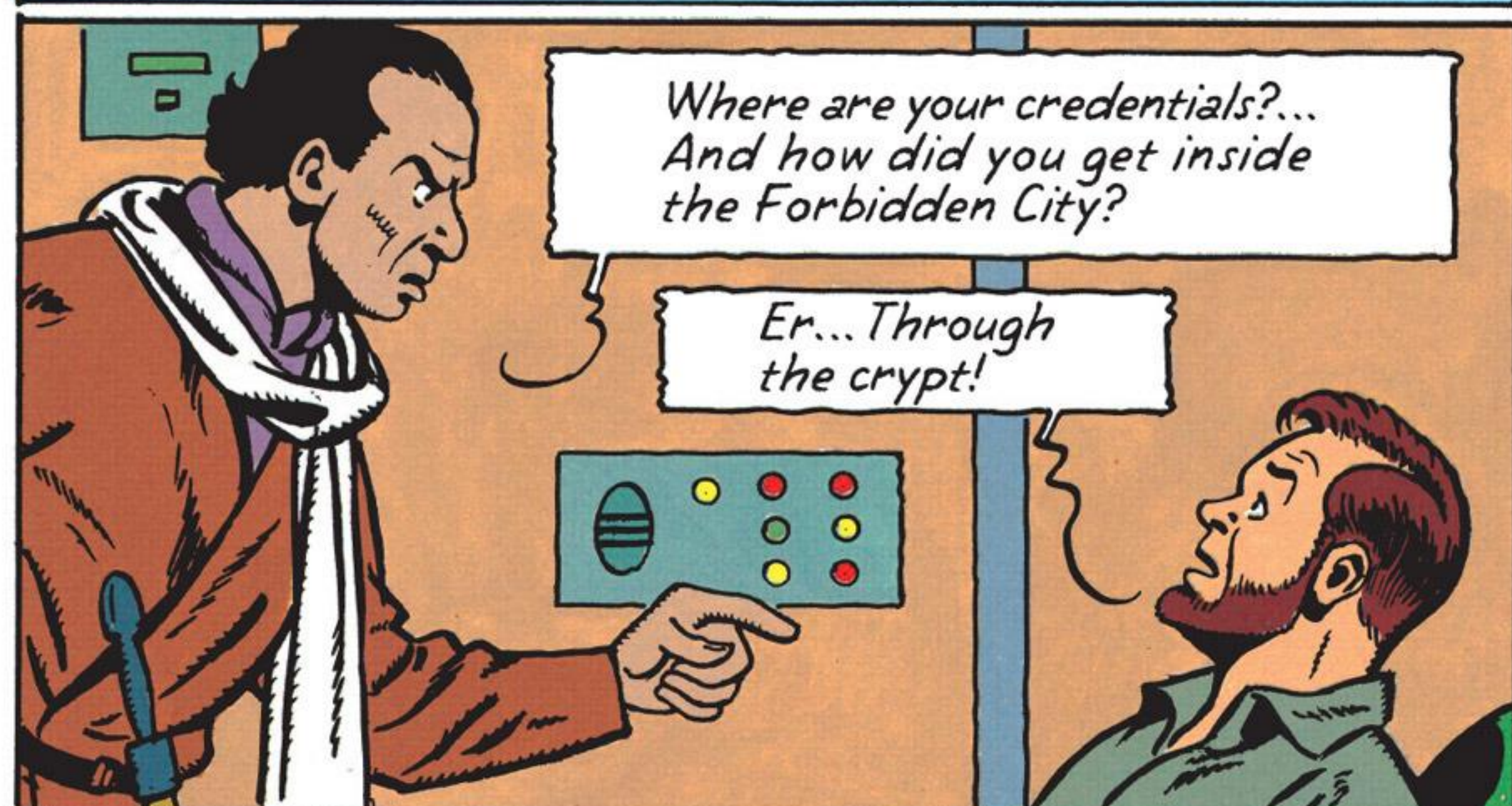
BUT A LOW MOAN INTERRUPTS THE DISCUSSION...



COMING TO, MORTIMER IS IMMEDIATELY BOMBARDED WITH QUESTIONS...



BUT THE SOMBRE-LOOKING MAN ASKS IN A HARSH TONE...



VERY CALMLY, THE MASTER INTERVENES...



AT THAT MOMENT, A YOUNG MAN RUSHES IN...



BEFORE ANYONE CAN ANSWER, THE DOOR OPENS UNDER THE CROWD'S PRESSURE...



BUT THE MASTER INTERPOSES HIMSELF.



Go, Xeno, prevent them from doing something premature that could ruin all our plans!...



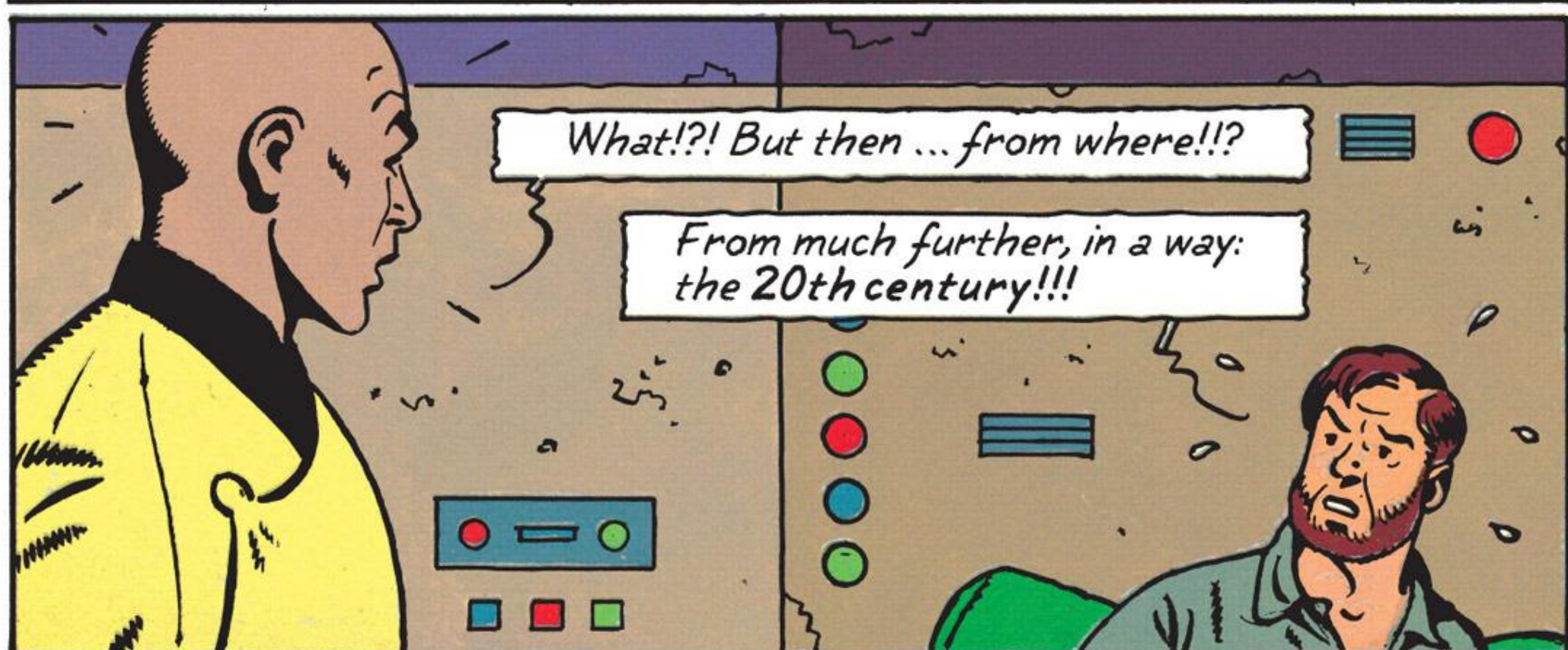
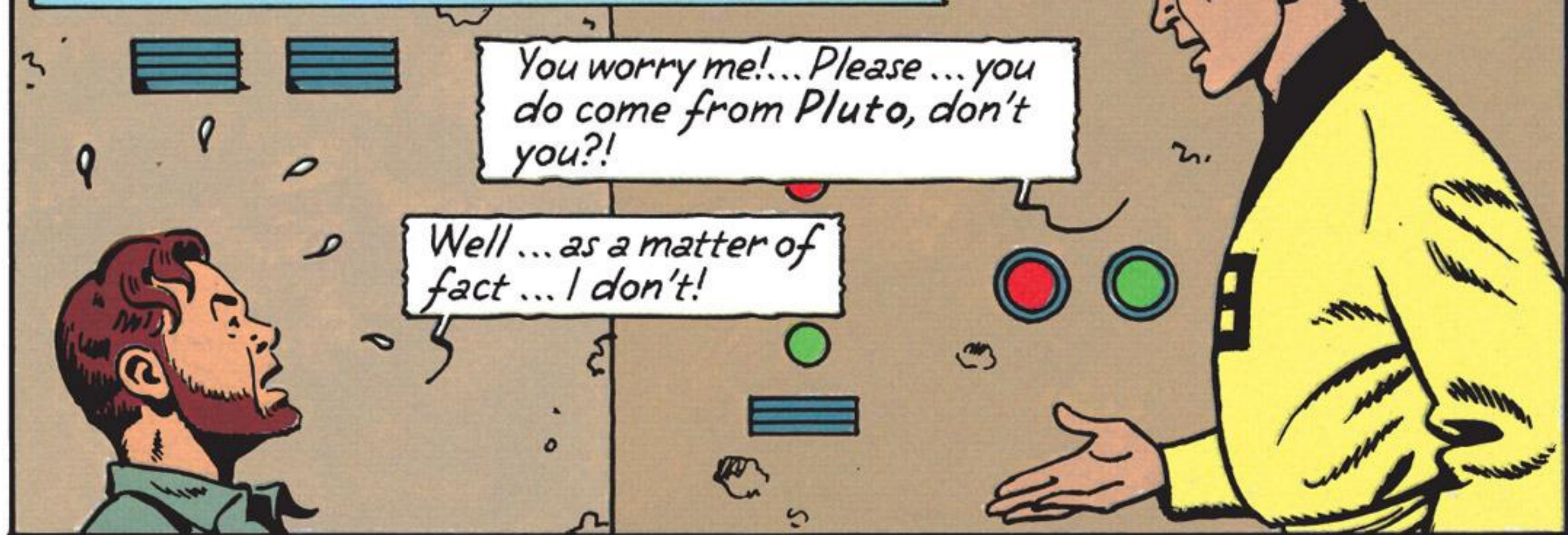
ONCE THE DOOR IS CLOSED AGAIN, THE MASTER TURNS TO MORTIMER...



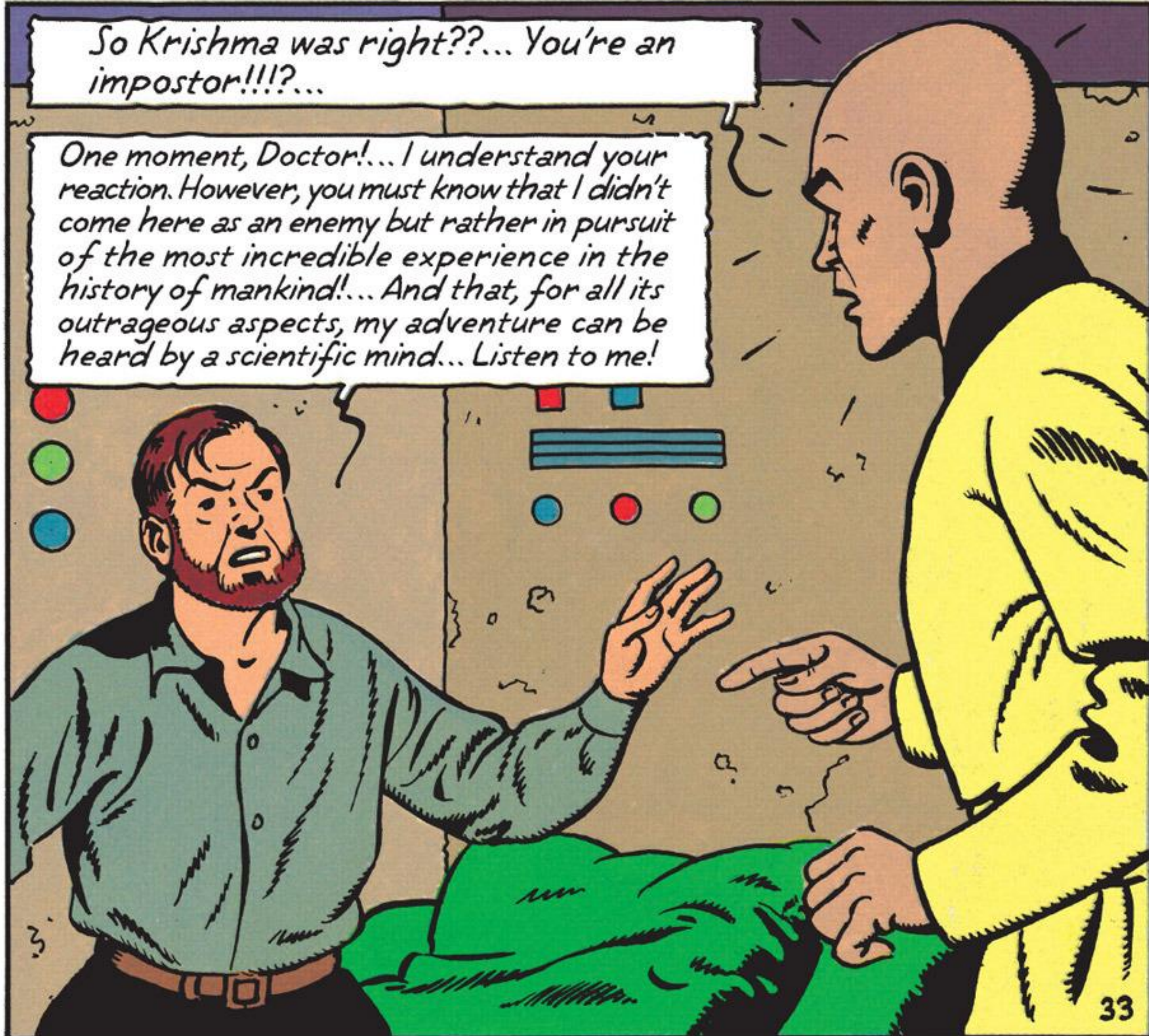
Huh! Probably!... But time is short, as is the patience of our men... Are your people willing to come to our help at last?!



SEEING MORTIMER'S CONFUSED EXPRESSION, FOCAS'S FEATURES HARDEN...



AT SUCH A FANTASTIC STATEMENT, FOCAS BLANCHES AND TAKES A STEP BACK...



WHILE THE PROFESSOR BEGINS RECOUNTING HIS ADVENTURES IN A TENSE ATMOSPHERE, KRISHMA HAS HURRIED AWAY...



Bah! It was probably a set-up. Faced with the indecision of his interplanetary allies, Focas will have fabricated that whole 'red-haired liberator' story to galvanise his troops!... Still, better to take some precautions ...



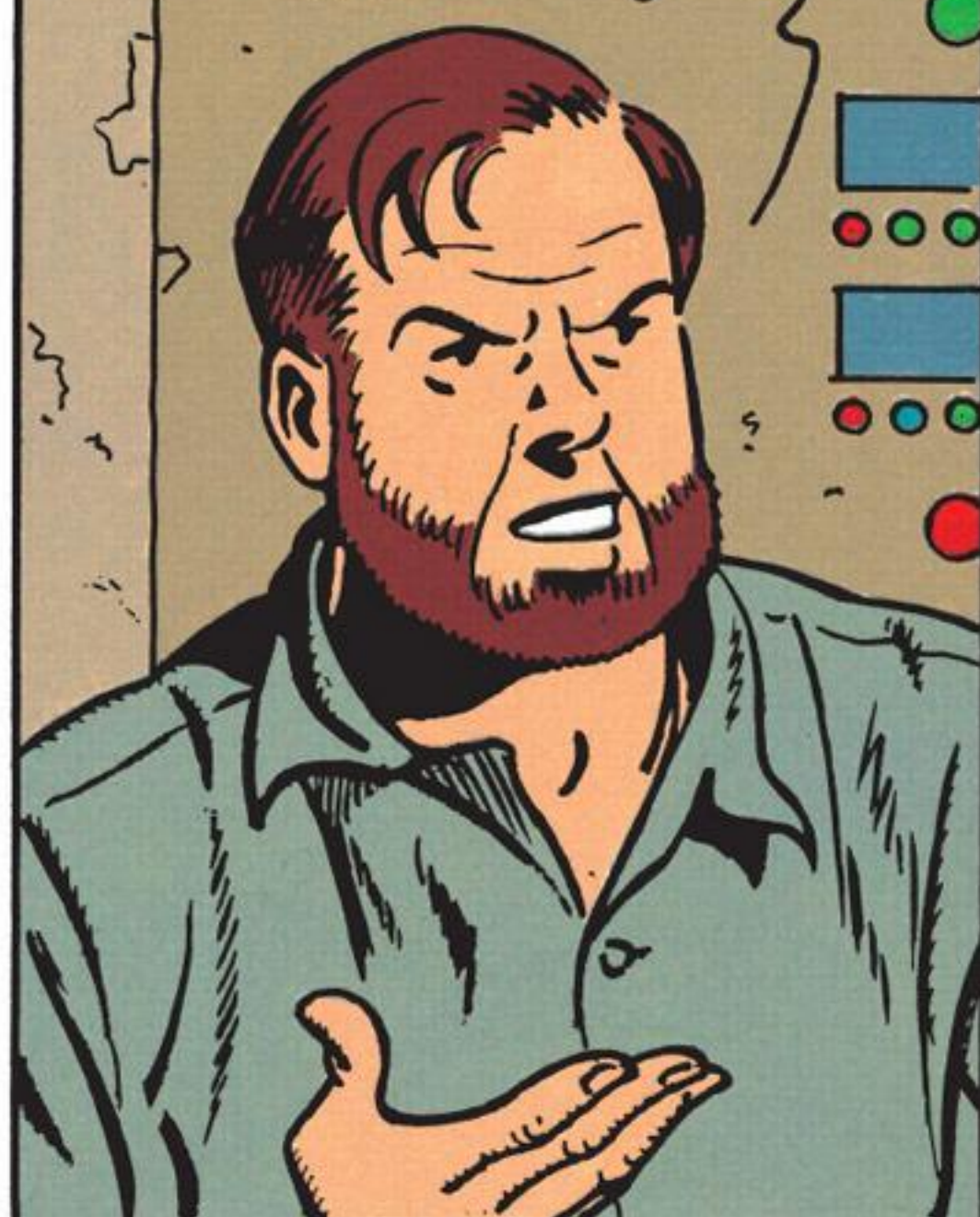
AFTER MAKING SURE HE IS ABSOLUTELY ALONE, HE BRINGS THE MINIATURE RADIO TRANSMITTER HE WEARS AROUND HIS WRIST TO HIS LIPS...

Hello!... Krishma to Minga... 3.0.3!... A so-called emissary from Pluto has arrived in strange circumstances... The conspirators are on alert and might take action soon. What are the orders? Over!...



WHILE KRISHMA CONTINUES HIS TROUBLING CONVERSATION, MORTIMER REACHES THE END OF HIS TALE...

...And that's how my third attempt brought me here across the great gulf of time... That's the whole truth, and the presence of the Chronoscaphe in the crypt is proof of it!



FOR A LONG TIME, FOCAS REMAINS DEEP IN THOUGHT. THEN HE SAYS:

Your story is unbelievable. My reason rejects it... though I want to accept it, as I feel you are sincere and loyal!... Unfortunately, you are now part of our adventure, anyway!...

How so!?!...



Let me explain: know that we are on the verge of launching an uprising on a cosmic scale. But my men, who are simple and credulous, have positively recognised you as the hero of a very ancient prophecy which predicts that a bearded, red-haired man from 'elsewhere' will bring about their liberation!... Telling them otherwise would obviously be disastrous for our movement... And that's why, whether we like it or not, we're forced to make you play that part...



But the problems of 21st-century people are completely alien to me!

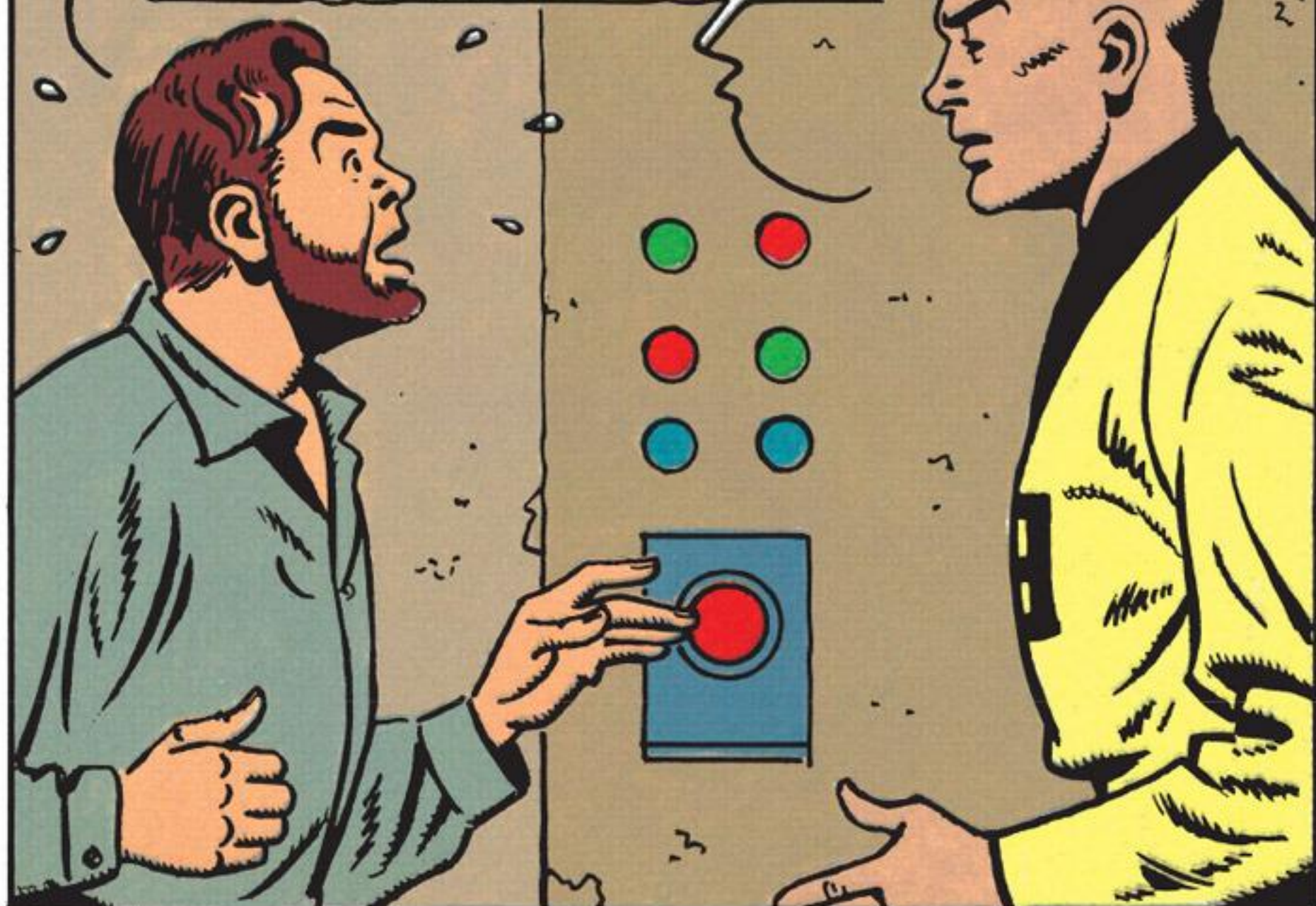
The 21st century!? You mean the 51st... This is the year 5060!!!!



AFTER A STUNNED MOMENT, MORTIMER EXCLAIMS:

But that's impossible!... There's an inscription down there in the Forbidden City that mentions the year 2050!

My dear fellow... That's more or less the date when the city was destroyed - 2075, to be precise!!

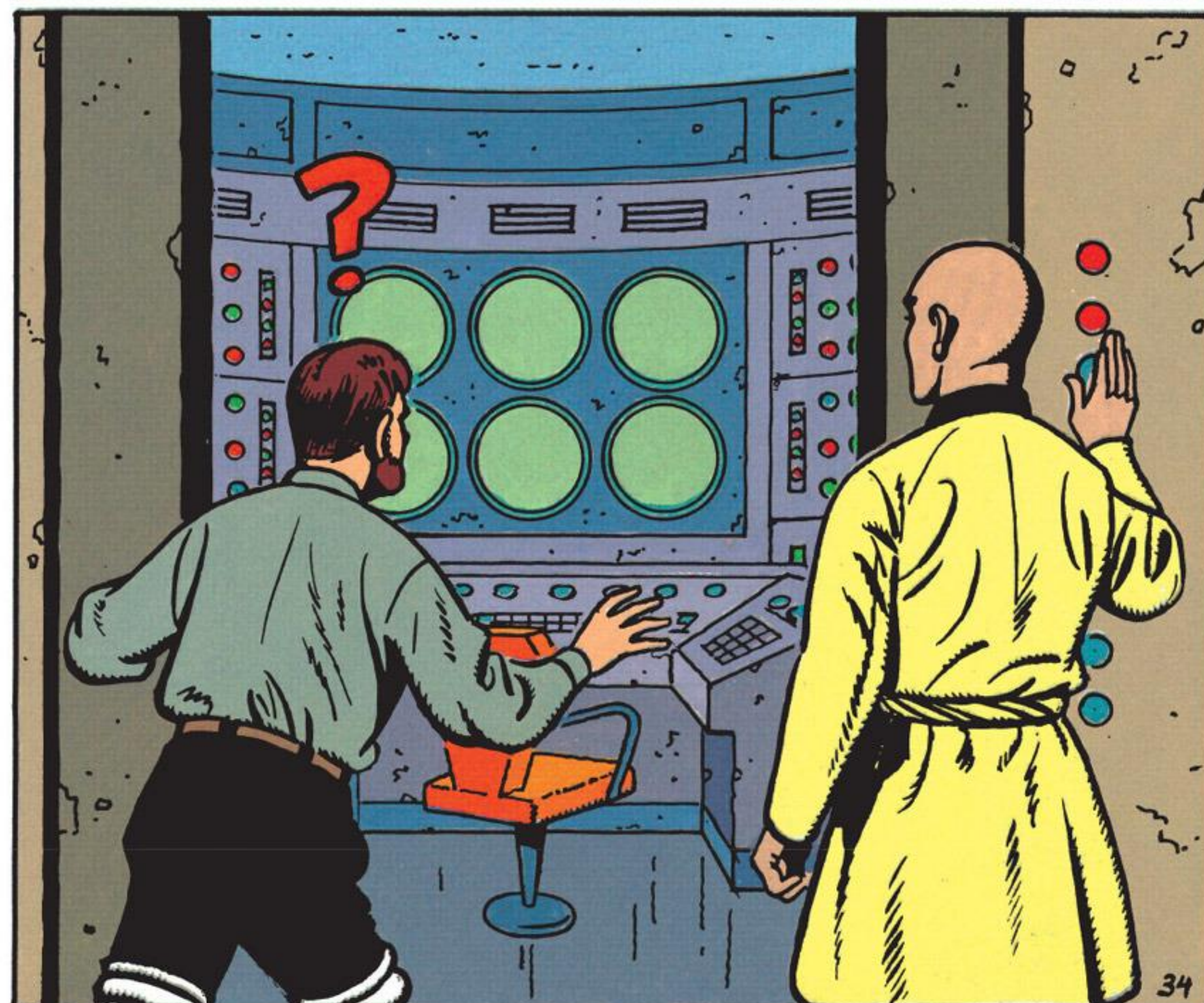


SEEING MORTIMER'S CONSTERNATION, FOCAS SOFTLY ADDS...

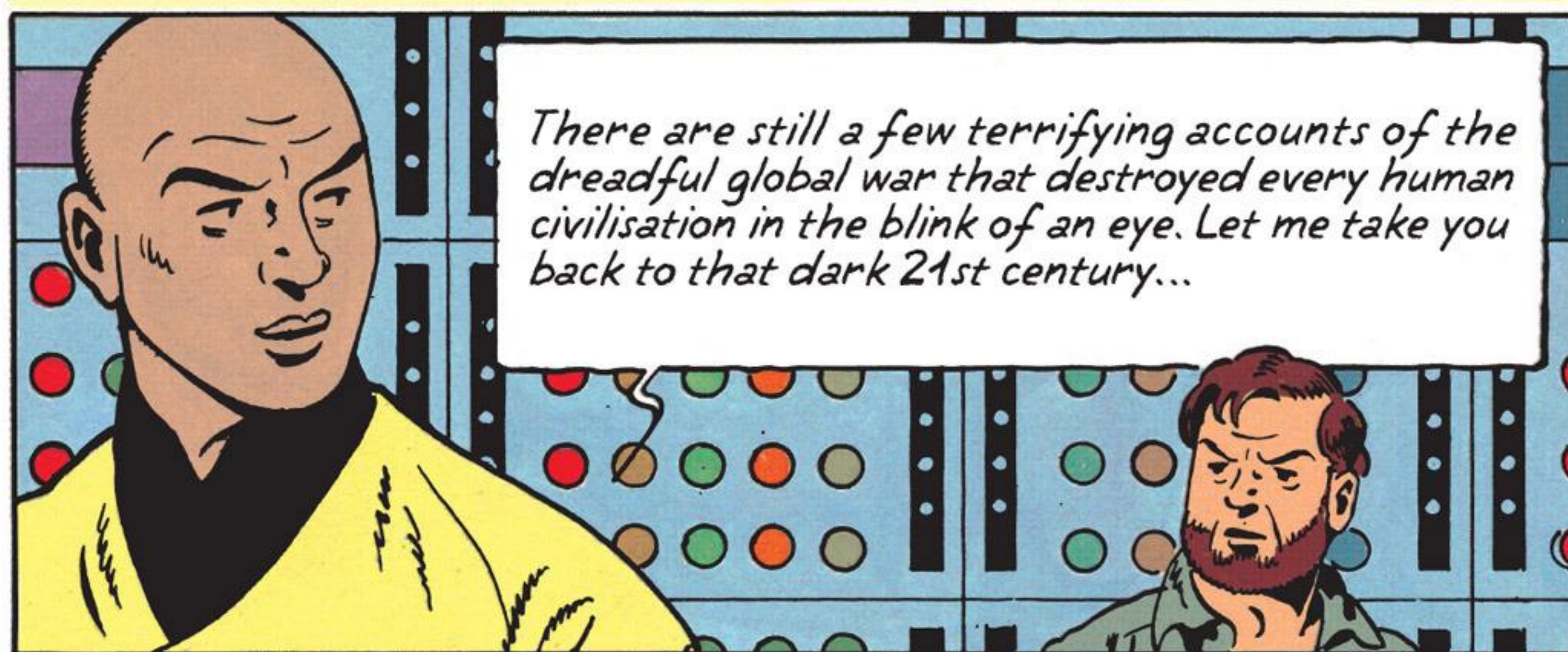
I think it would be better if I, too, explained what happened while your Chronoscaphe was travelling towards us... That way, you can make an informed decision. Come!



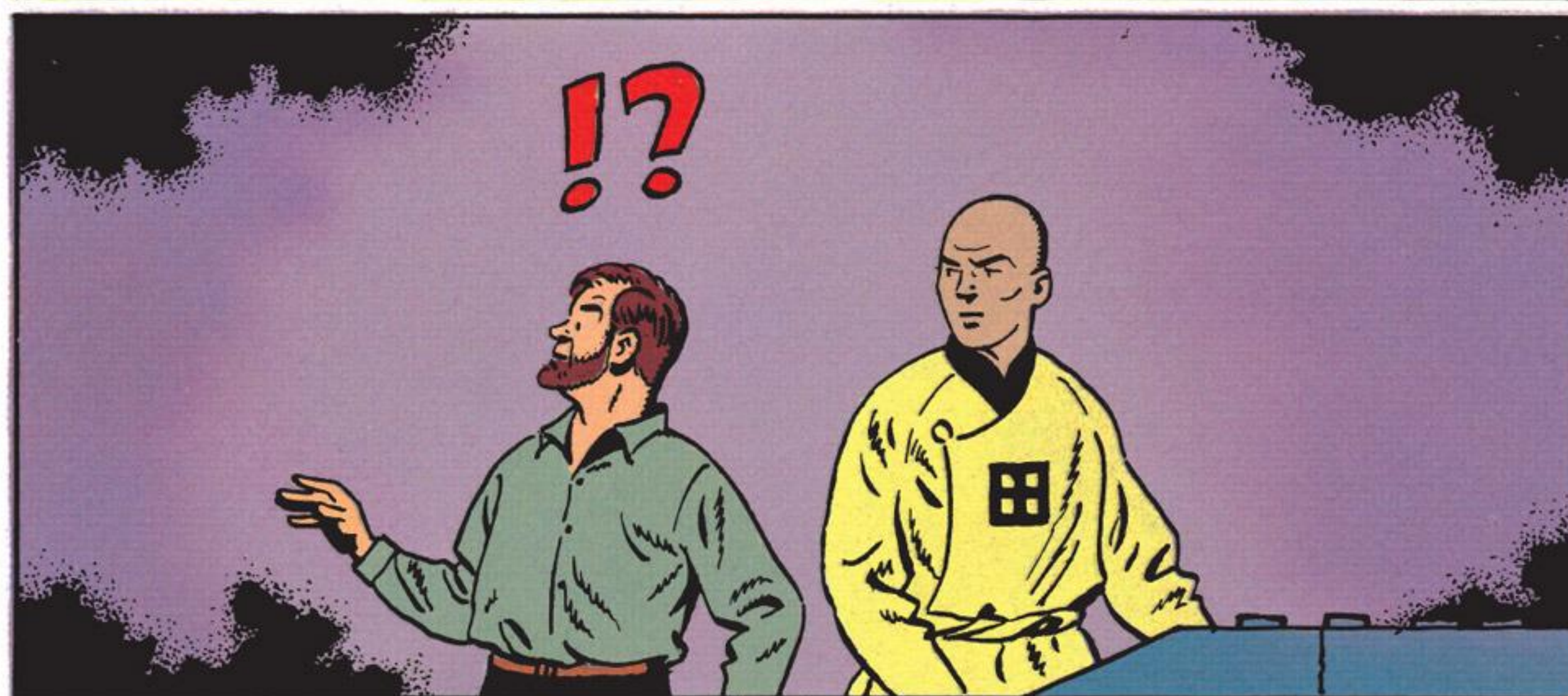
FOCAS WAVES HIS HAND IN FRONT OF AN ELECTRONIC SENSOR, CAUSING A SECTION OF THE WALL TO SLIDE OPEN AND REVEALING A ROOM COVERED IN SWITCHES, DIALS AND BLINKING LIGHTS...



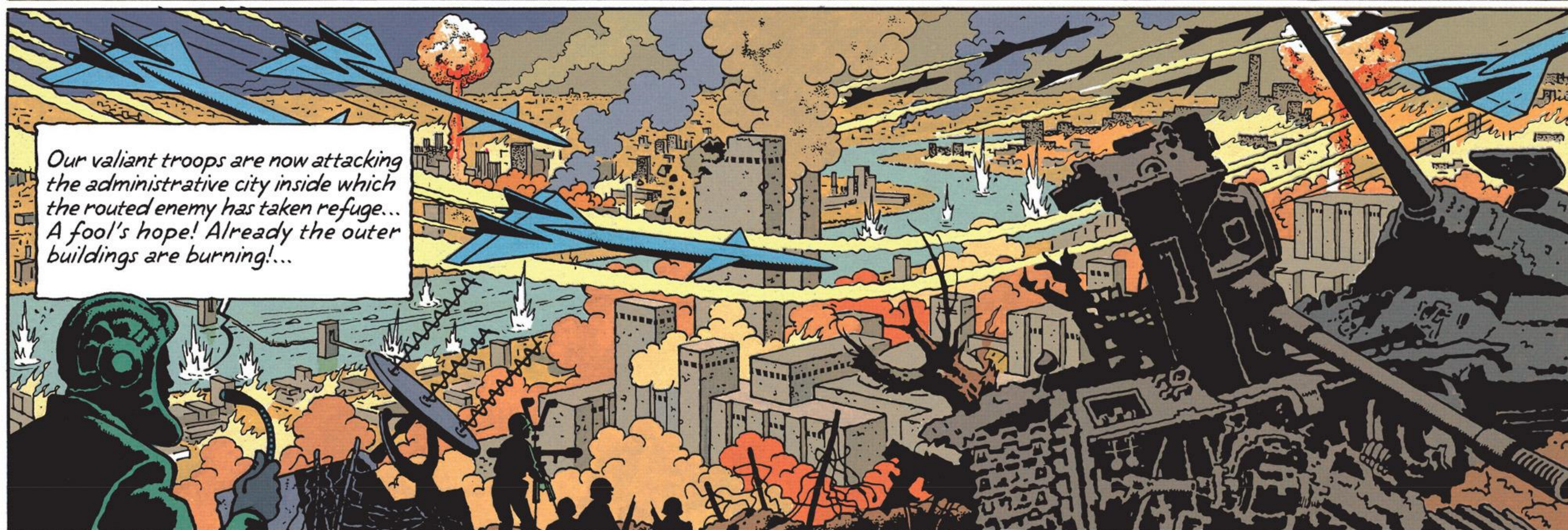
FOCAS WALKS TO A PANEL AND MANIPULATES A FEW CONTROLS BEFORE GOING ON...



WITH A SINGLE GESTURE ALL THE LIGHTS GO OUT, THEN A DIFFUSE GLOW SURROUNDS THE TWO MEN...

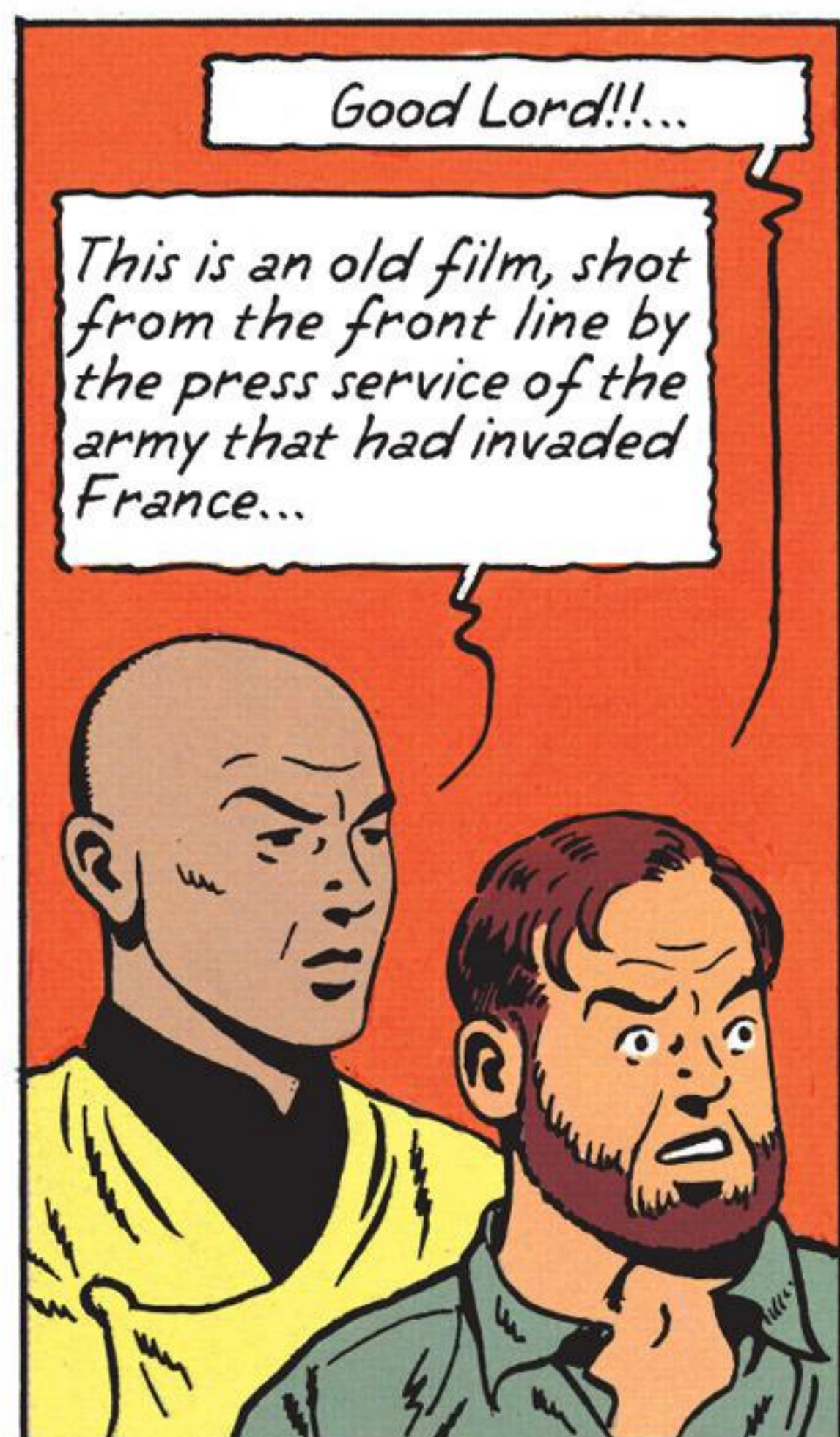


AND SUDDENLY AN APOCALYPTIC VISION APPEARS AROUND THEM: LA ROCHE-GUYON IN THE THROES OF A MASSIVE BATTLE!... SURROUNDED BY CLUSTERS OF EXPLOSIONS, TITANIC TANKS AND ROBOTIC PLANES FIGHT A MERCILESS DUEL WHILE, CLEAR AND CALM OVER THE DIN, A SPEAKER'S VOICE GIVES A COMMENTARY ON THE SCENE...

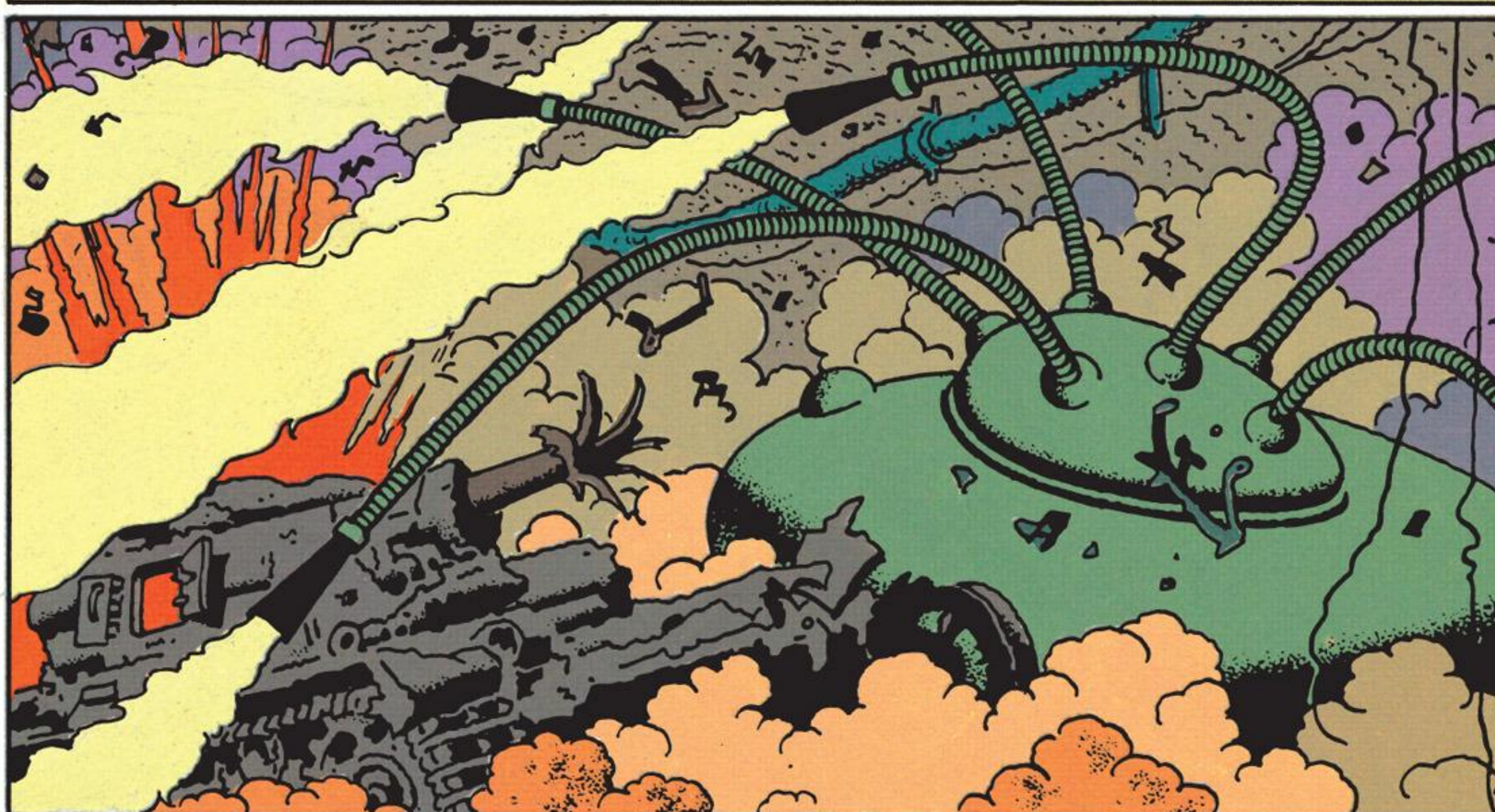


Good Lord!!...

This is an old film, shot from the front line by the press service of the army that had invaded France...



THE IMAGE CHANGES THEN, REPLACED BY AN INSIDE VIEW OF THE CITY. SPEWING LONG JETS OF FIRE, AN ENORMOUS MACHINE LUMBERS THROUGH THE GALLERIES, METHODICALLY CLEARING THEM AS IT GOES!!!



It's horrible!

Oh, how I understand your reaction!... But watch the rest...

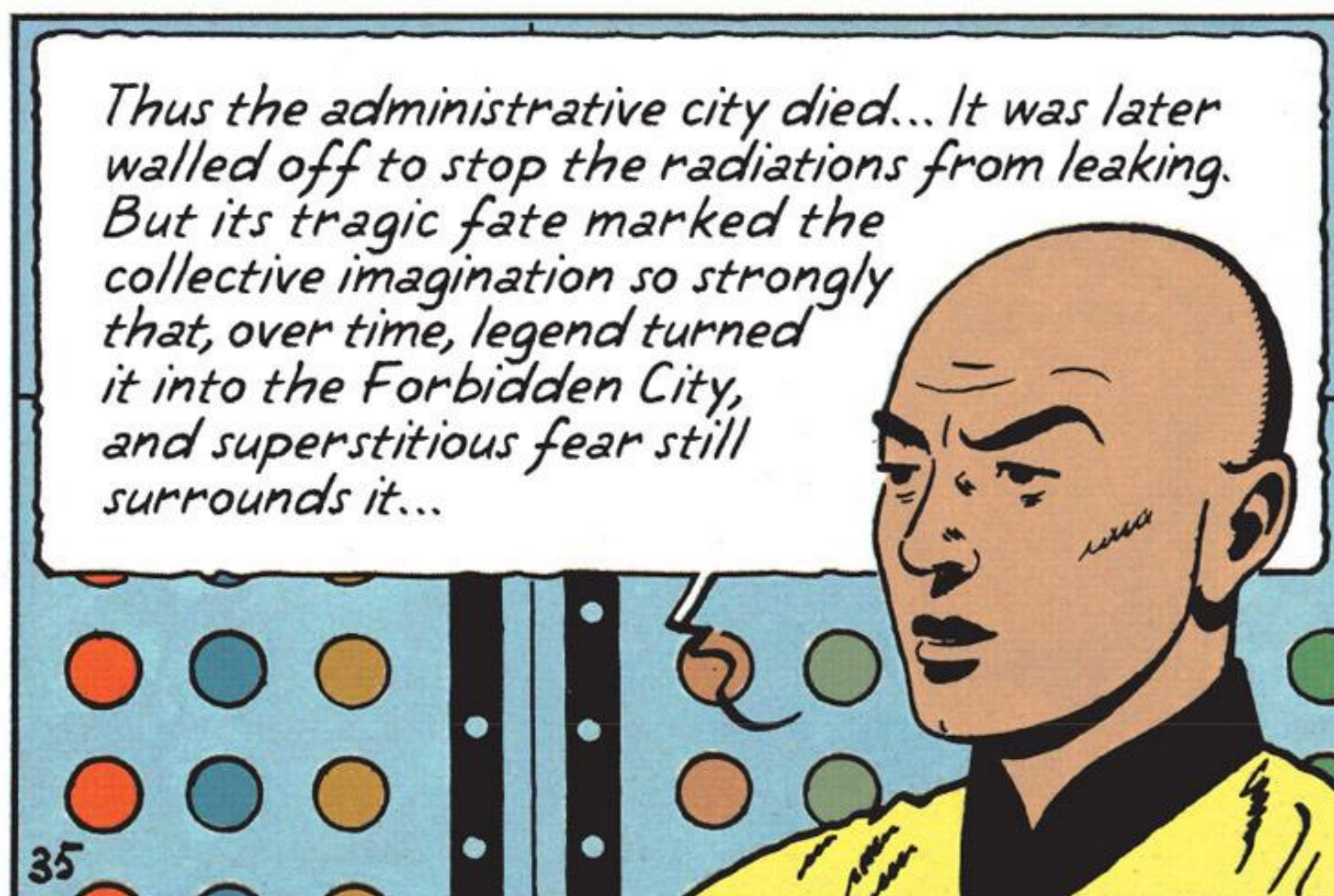


WITHOUT WARNING, THE VIEW RETURNS OUTSIDE...



SUDDENLY, EVERYTHING DISAPPEARS AND THE LIGHTS COME BACK ON.

Thus the administrative city died... It was later walled off to stop the radiations from leaking. But its tragic fate marked the collective imagination so strongly that, over time, legend turned it into the Forbidden City, and superstitious fear still surrounds it...



AFTER A MOMENT'S SILENCE, FOCAS RESUMES...

Tragedies such as the one you just witnessed struck every nation of the world at the same time. Nuclear and bacteriological war raged, and people exterminated each other with such blind fury that, within months, the most advanced civilisations were thrown back into chaos and barbarism!...



Surely not?!...

...Man had been reduced to level zero of advancement, and the struggle to survive became his only preoccupation. All science, all culture were forgotten. Ethnic groups merged; languages – already impoverished by a recent phonetic reform – devolved into a form of utilitarian pidgin... In the heart of Asia, however, by some miracle a kernel of civilisation had survived, and an iron-handed leader emerged, who took on the task of reorganising humanity along the social lines of an ant colony. His descendants, soulless monsters to a man, completed his endeavour... Today, the last of them, known as the Sublime Guide, rules over uneducated, terrified masses of people called Subjects – with the help of a caste of functionaries, technocrats and policemen. The Subjects live in complexes – vast, dreary underground barracks – whereas the leaders alone have the right to live on the surface...

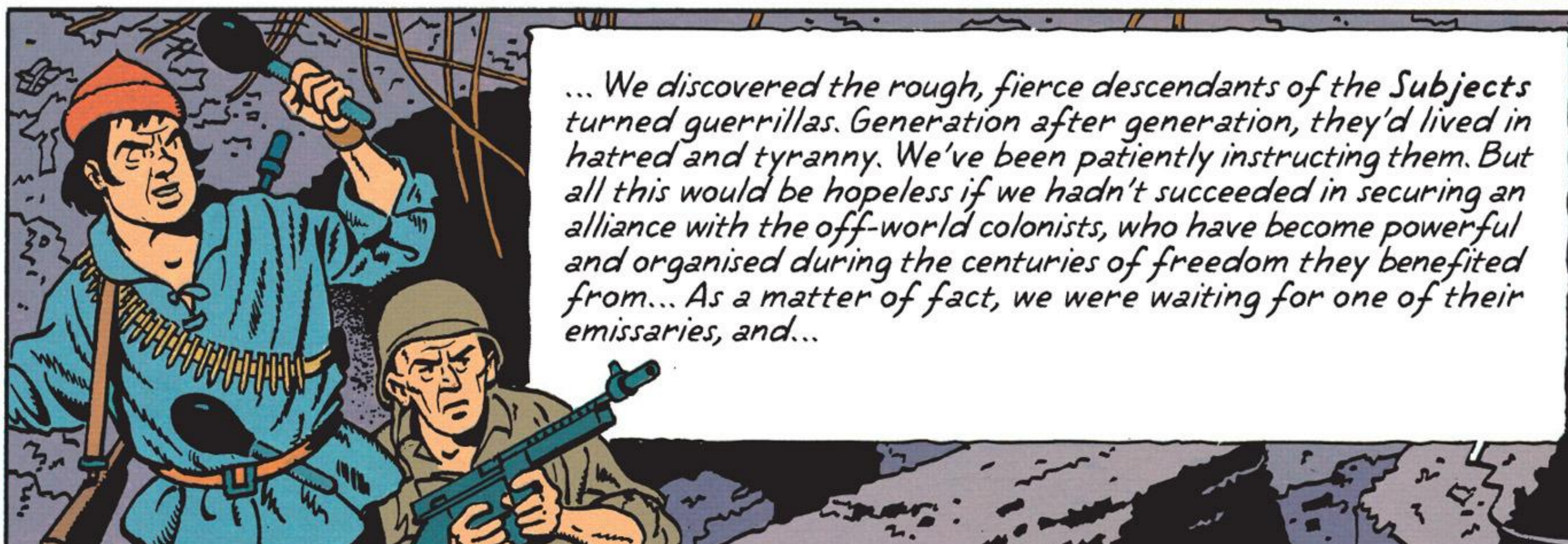


...In the 30th century there was a revolt, but it was crushed with unimaginable savagery. Many Subjects, opting for a precarious existence over humiliating serfdom, went underground in numerous remote corners of the planet, most often literally: caves, mines, even sometimes local 'Forbidden Cities'. As for those technicians who had joined the cause of the insurgents, they clandestinely emigrated to the various planets of the solar system, where they were able to resist the tyranny of the Earth. That vast spurt of independence was called the great schism...



And since that time?...

...I'm getting there... It seems like Man, who had for so long passively accepted that demeaning serfdom, had permanently renounced freedom... But the unexpected discovery of an ancient document on the civilisations of the 20th and 21st centuries has acted like a tsunami, sweeping away all the ideas, dogmas and principles that had for centuries been the undisputed basis of our society. The description of life in those distant days sounded so prodigious that some of the hardest among us decided to band together to topple the regime and restore those happy times!... I'm the one they chose to fulfil the plans of our vast project...



... We discovered the rough, fierce descendants of the Subjects turned guerrillas. Generation after generation, they'd lived in hatred and tyranny. We've been patiently instructing them. But all this would be hopeless if we hadn't succeeded in securing an alliance with the off-world colonists, who have become powerful and organised during the centuries of freedom they benefited from... As a matter of fact, we were waiting for one of their emissaries, and...

...And you mistook me for him?...

Precisely!... The thing is, time is running out!

What do you mean?...



You see, the Sublime Guide has recently learnt through his spies that some of those he thought he could trust are ready to rise up against him. He's ordered me, as the planet's foremost biologist, to create a means of depriving anyone suspected of wanting to change the current world order of all free will, all desire to think, all personal initiative. The truth is that his ultimate, deadly goal is to turn each and every one of us, regardless of rank, into a dumb, submissive robot – in other words, a perfect little drone!!!

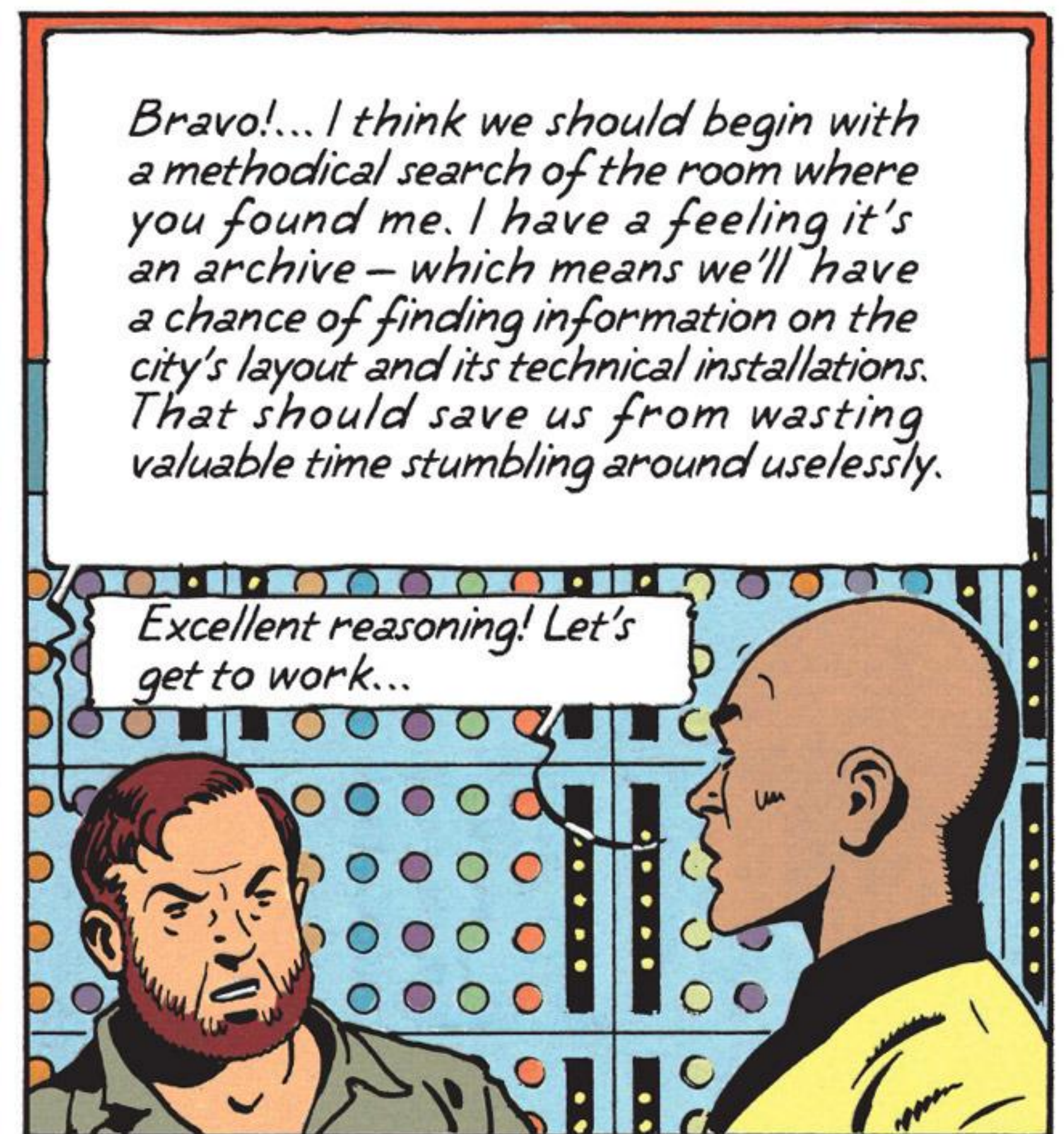
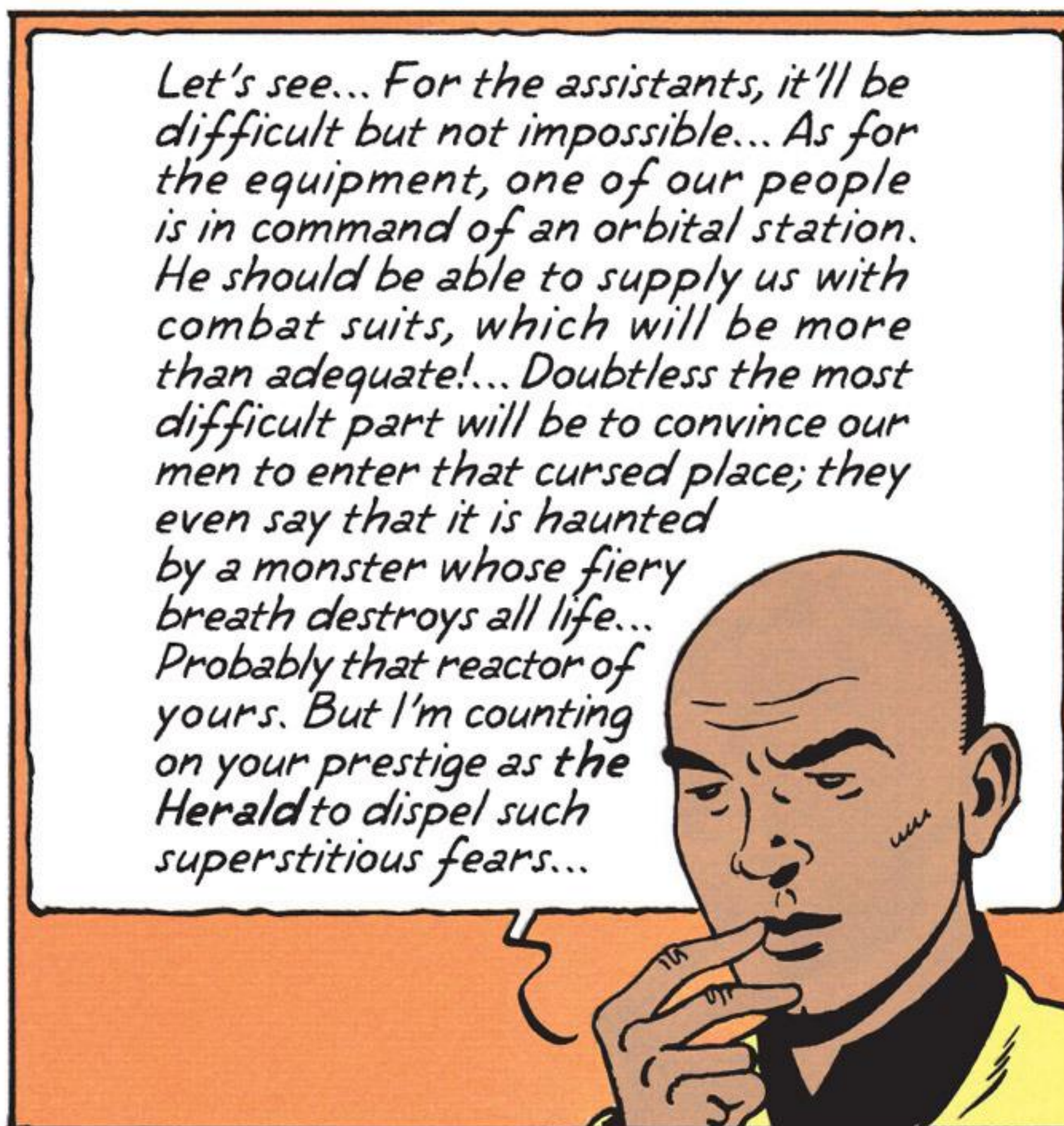
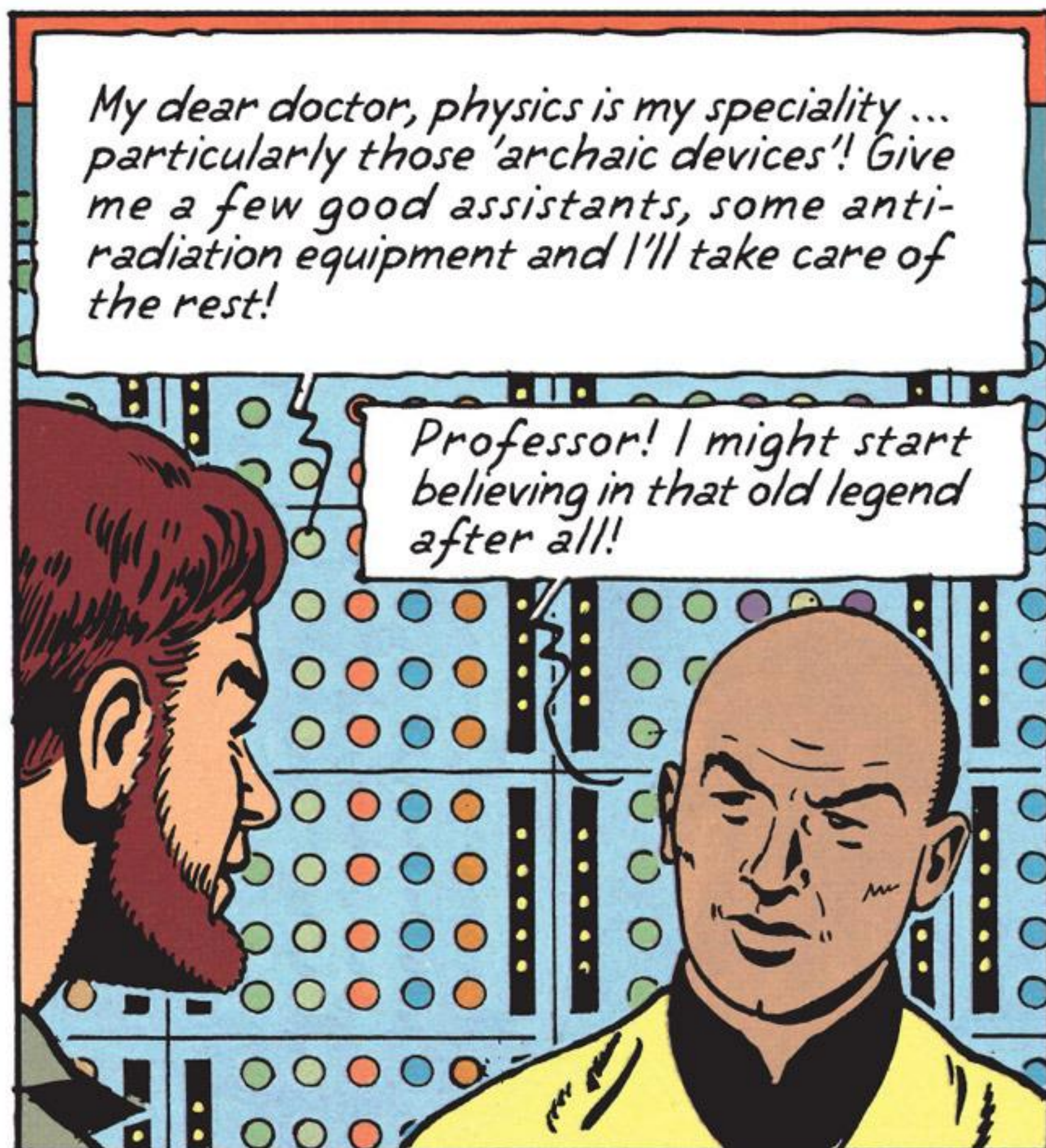
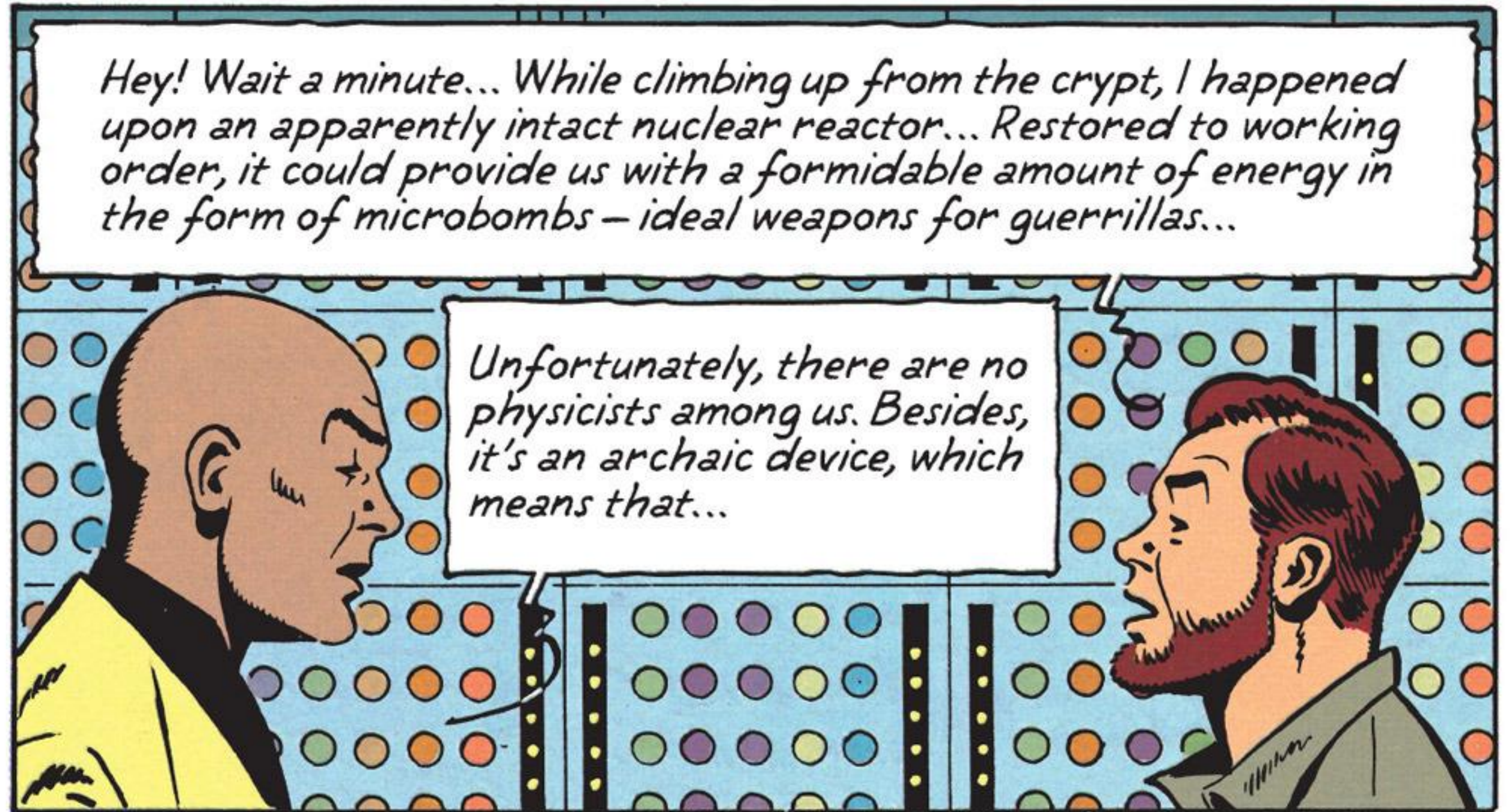
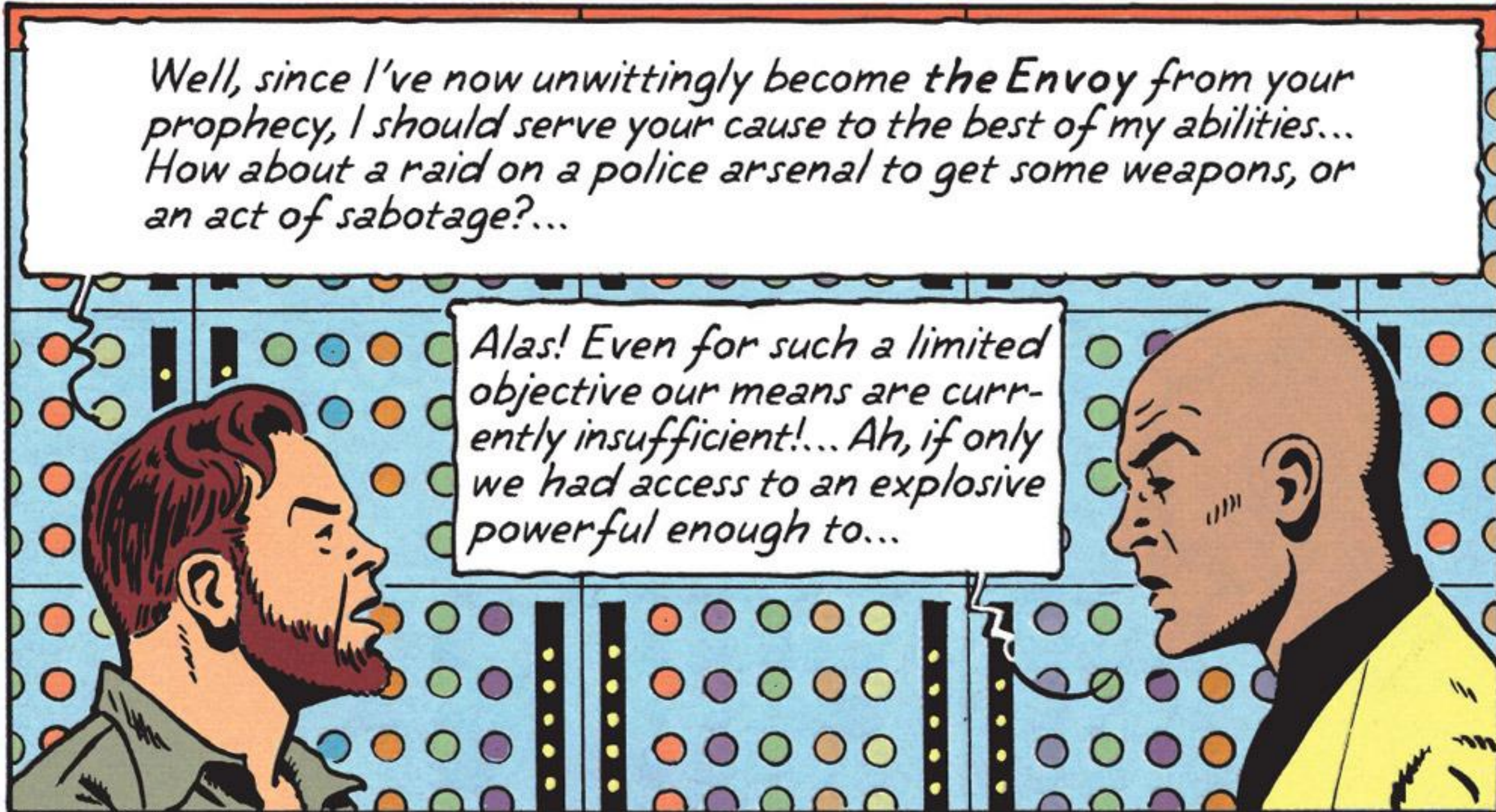


APPALLED, MORTIMER REMAINS LOST IN THOUGHT FOR A WHILE. THEN...

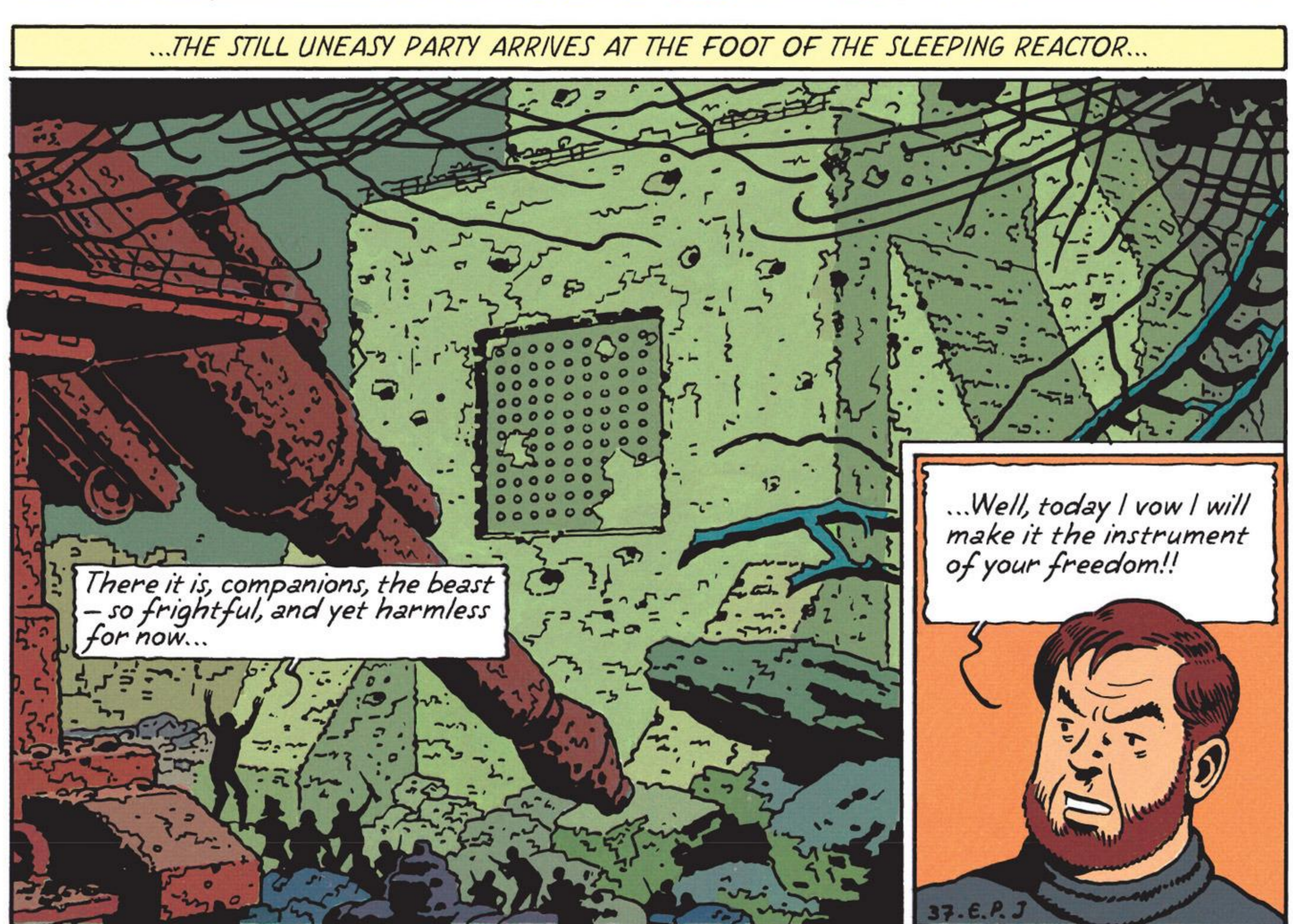
Dr Focas, you've convinced me... I'm with you! You can count on me!!!

I knew it!!





SEVERAL DAYS LATER... MORTIMER'S SUPPOSITIONS HAVE PROVEN EXACT AND THE DEPOT YIELDED A WEALTH OF UNHOPED-FOR INFORMATION. AS FOR THE **SUBJECTS**, GALVANISED BY MORTIMER'S PERSONALITY, THEY'VE MANAGED TO OVERCOME THEIR DREAD! SO, ONE OF THE BARRIERS HAS BEEN BREACHED, AND THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMANDO ARE NOW POURING THROUGH THE OPENING, BRAVELY FOLLOWING MORTIMER AND THEIR LEADERS INTO THE MYSTERIOUS FORBIDDEN CITY!



WHILE THE MEN IMMEDIATELY BEGIN TO CLEAN UP AND SET-UP TEMPORARY QUARTERS, MORTIMER AND FOCAS START LOOKING FOR A LOCATION FOR THE COMMAND POST – UNAWARE THAT KRISHMA IS SPYING ON THEM FROM AFAR...

...At the end of the day, it's because the reactor wasn't in service at the time of the disaster that we're lucky enough to find it almost intact today...



...And what are your plans?...

First, I must study the reactor's blueprints we were fortunate to find while someone looks for the stockpile of fissile material that must be somewhere beneath our feet... Then, once the atomic pile is repaired, we can initiate production of the fuels we need to manufacture microbombs: deuterium, tritium, etc... In other words, everything that...



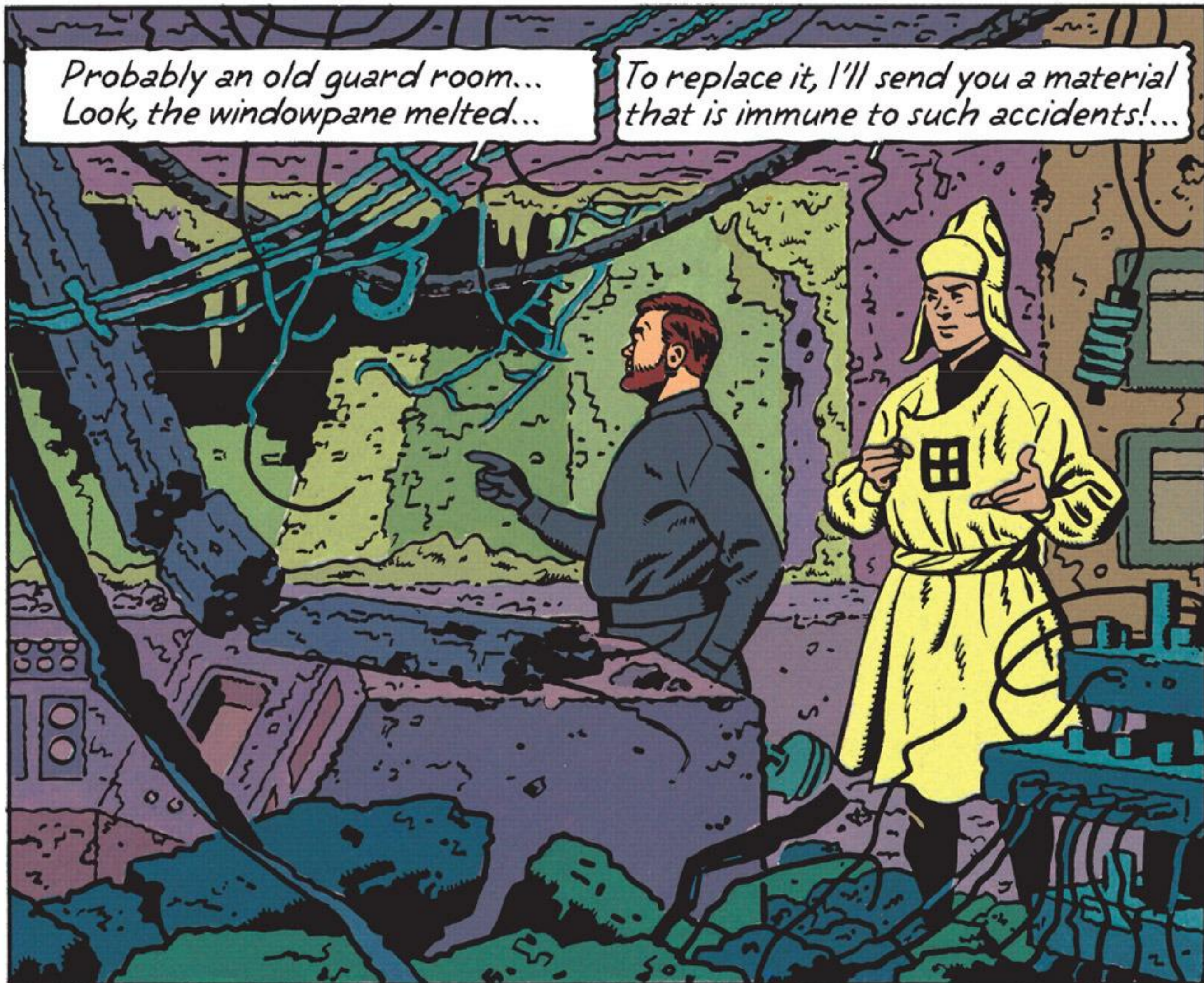
Ah, but I think I see a spot that will be perfect for us!



SOON, THE TWO MEN ARE LOOKING AT THE INSIDE OF A BUNKER THAT IS RELATIVELY UNDATED...

Probably an old guard room... Look, the windowpane melted...

To replace it, I'll send you a material that is immune to such accidents!...

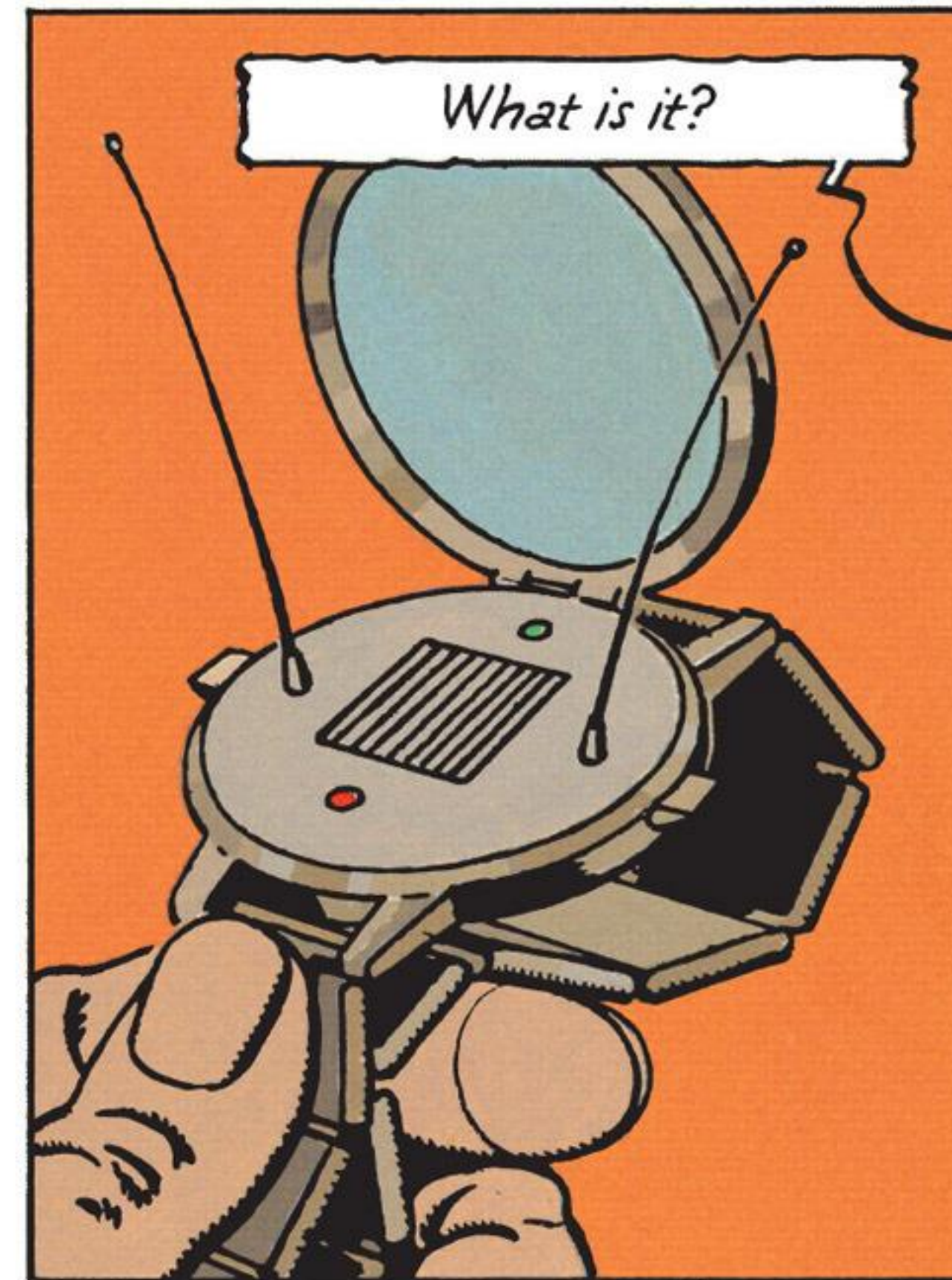


...But first, let me give you this. It will be absolutely invaluable to us...



AS HE SPEAKS, FOCAS HANDS MORTIMER A BRACELET EQUIPPED WITH AN UNUSUAL-LOOKING DIAL.

What is it?



A 'PIT' – portable individual television. It uses micrometric waves. Only ranking police officers and high-level functionaries have them. This one is set to the same wavelength as mine, and will allow you to contact me in any circumstance!... See, all you have to do is press...



BUT MORTIMER CUTS HIM OFF...

Shh!!



...AND SPRINTS TO THE DOOR LEFT AJAR!...



No one?... I could have sworn...



E. P. JACOBS

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HOWEVER, AS THE PROFESSOR LOWERS HIS GAZE, HE HAPPENS TO NOTICE A TINY TRANSLUCENT DISC.



INTRIGUED, HE PICKS IT UP.



Strange... It looks like plastic...

FOCAS, WHO HAS JOINED MORTIMER, BLANCHES...

Do you know what it is?

Yes...

...It's a beacon. It's tuned to a specific frequency. It can be stuck anywhere, and it'll broadcast a signal to a special receiver that indicates its position... And this receiver belongs to ... the police!!! Do you understand what it means?...

That we have a traitor in our ranks!?!...

EXTREMELY WORRIED, THE TWO MEN RETRACE THEIR STEPS, INTENT ON FINDING ANY OTHER SUCH BEACONS...



They're hard to see unless you know they're there...

Ah! Here's another one!...

IN A SHORT SPACE OF TIME THEY FIND ANOTHER THREE, PLACED AT STRATEGIC LOCATIONS...



Three beacons over 600 feet... There's no doubt about it - whoever was spying on us from behind the door marked out the path...

...straight to our command post too... But who?...

AT THAT MOMENT, THEY FIND KRISHMA OVERSEEING A CLEARING CREW.



Krishma! Did anyone get close to this gallery?

Er... No, Master, no one!

Look at what we found not far from here!



What?! Police beacons!?!... But that's terrible!...

Indeed!...

...Tell Xeno to gather all the men who aren't part of the nuclear team and head back up immediately... As for you, search every place we went through since we entered the city. I'll see you upstairs... And make sure this doesn't get out!

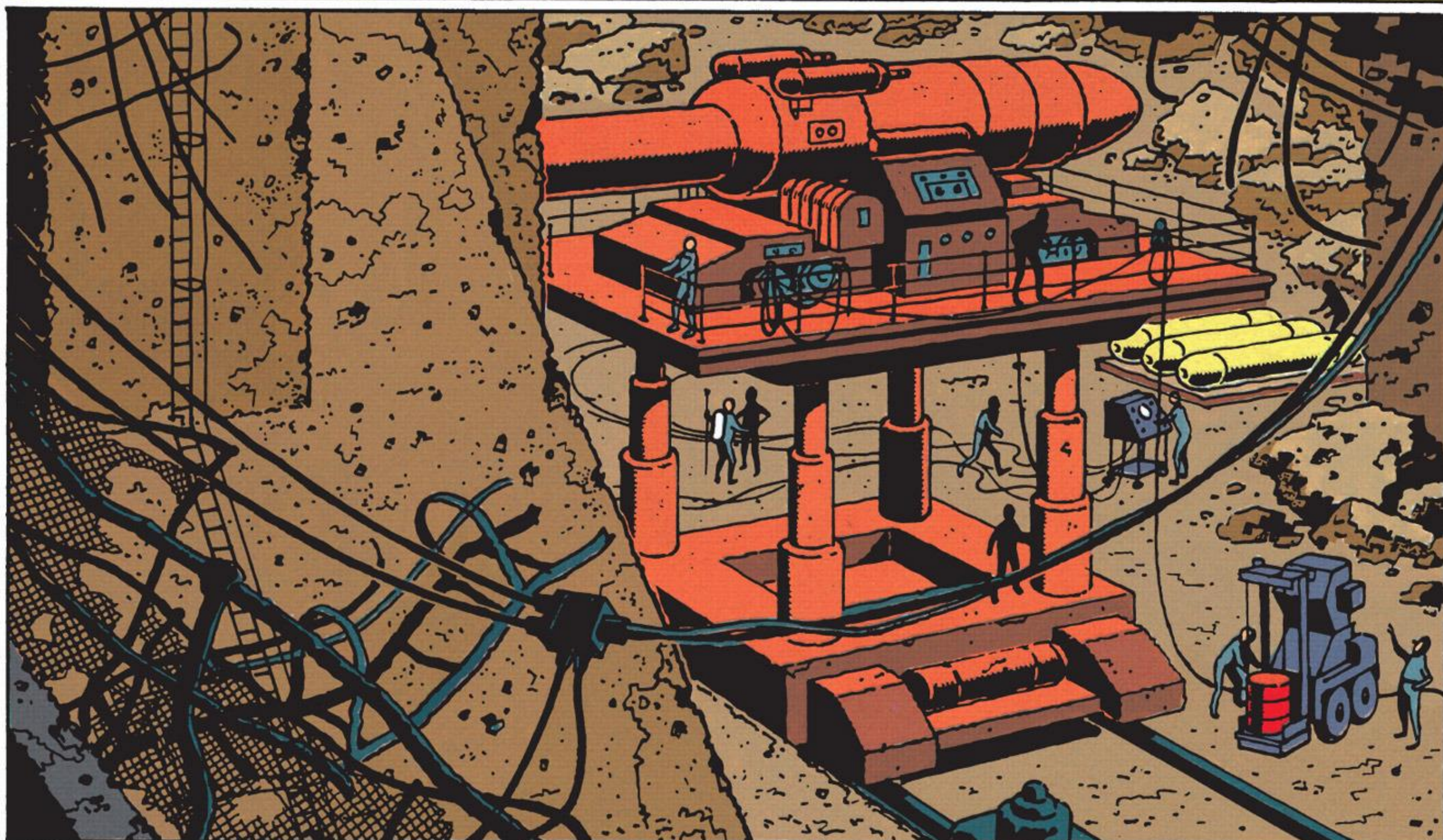
You can count on me, Master!

Professor, this ... incident could wreak havoc on our plans!... I must leave you in order to take all necessary measures to discover the traitor and ensure our security... As for the nuclear operations, I'll make sure you have ample supplies of food and equipment... Ah! I almost forgot: our radio call signs will be 'Struggle' and 'Freedom'.

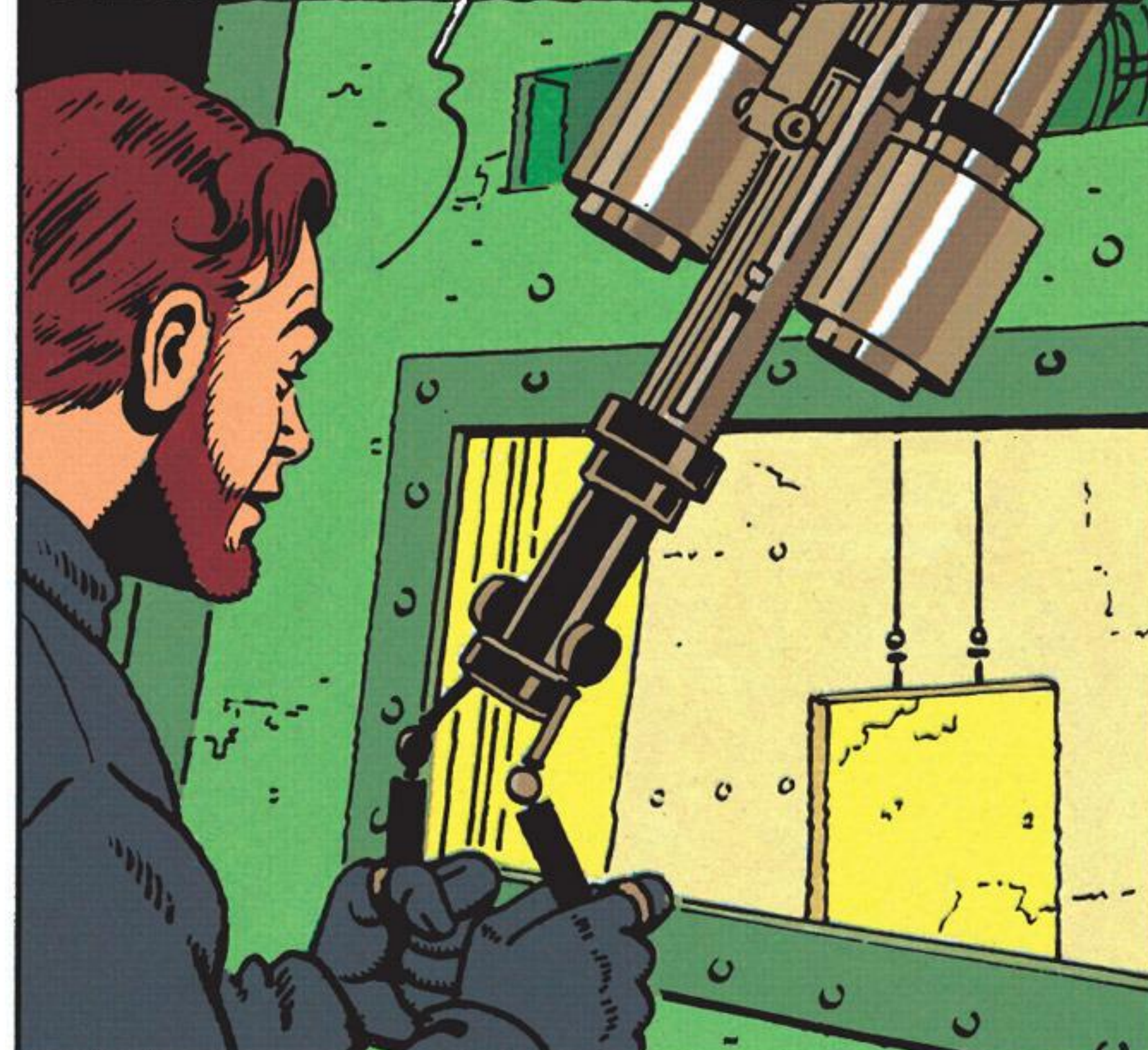
Very well! Indeed, one can't be too careful... But I'm confident!...

SEVERAL WEEKS HAVE PASSED... THANKS TO THE DISCOVERY OF PRE-PROCESSED FISSILE MATERIALS* AND THE TIRELESS LABOUR OF MORTIMER AND HIS ASSISTANTS, THE REACTOR HAS BEEN RAPIDLY REACTIVATED...

...AND ALREADY THE FIRST **FUELS** NEEDED FOR MANUFACTURING THE MICROBOMBS ARE READY FOR ASSEMBLY...



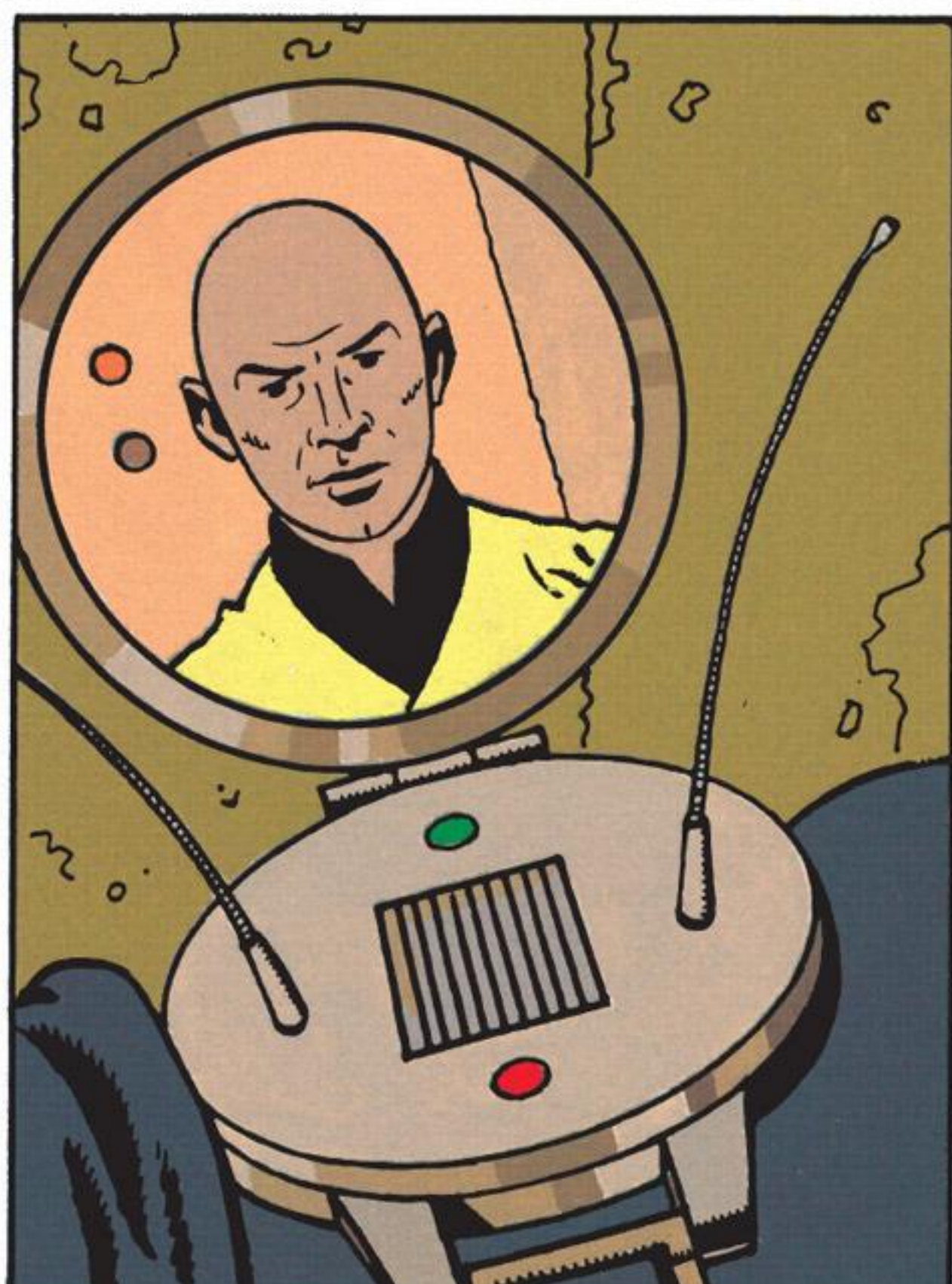
Perfect!... That way we'll have sufficient firepower at our disposal to counterbalance the enemy's weapons – at least in part...



A SLIGHT VIBRATION ON HIS WRIST SUDDENLY INFORMS MORTIMER THAT FOCAS IS TRYING TO REACH HIM...



PUSHING A BUTTON, HE HEARS THE AGREED CALL SIGN: 'FREEDOM CALLING', WHICH HE ANSWERS WITH 'STRUGGLE LISTENING'. FOCAS'S FACE APPEARS ON THE TINY SCREEN.



IN A LOW, FADED VOICE, THE MASTER QUICKLY SAYS...

Professor, I'm very worried. I've just been summoned by the Sublime Council... Obviously I have no choice but to go... And since I do not know what awaits me, I'm delegating my powers to Krishma. I'll give him our wavelength...



Er!... No, actually... I'd rather you didn't... If I have an urgent message to send, I'll use the normal channels...



Very well – as you wish... Another thing: despite my repeated calls, we still haven't heard from our off-planet allies. I don't know what to do, as without them we're powerless!... Anyway, how are you progressing?...



Everything is going fine!... We're about to assemble our first bomb. Perhaps our resolve will convince our friends to come forward!

Let's hope so!... Well, goodbye then, Mortimer!...



Krishma, I'm leaving immediately. Let's hope I will finally receive an answer to my many messages when I get back.

I share the same hope, Master.



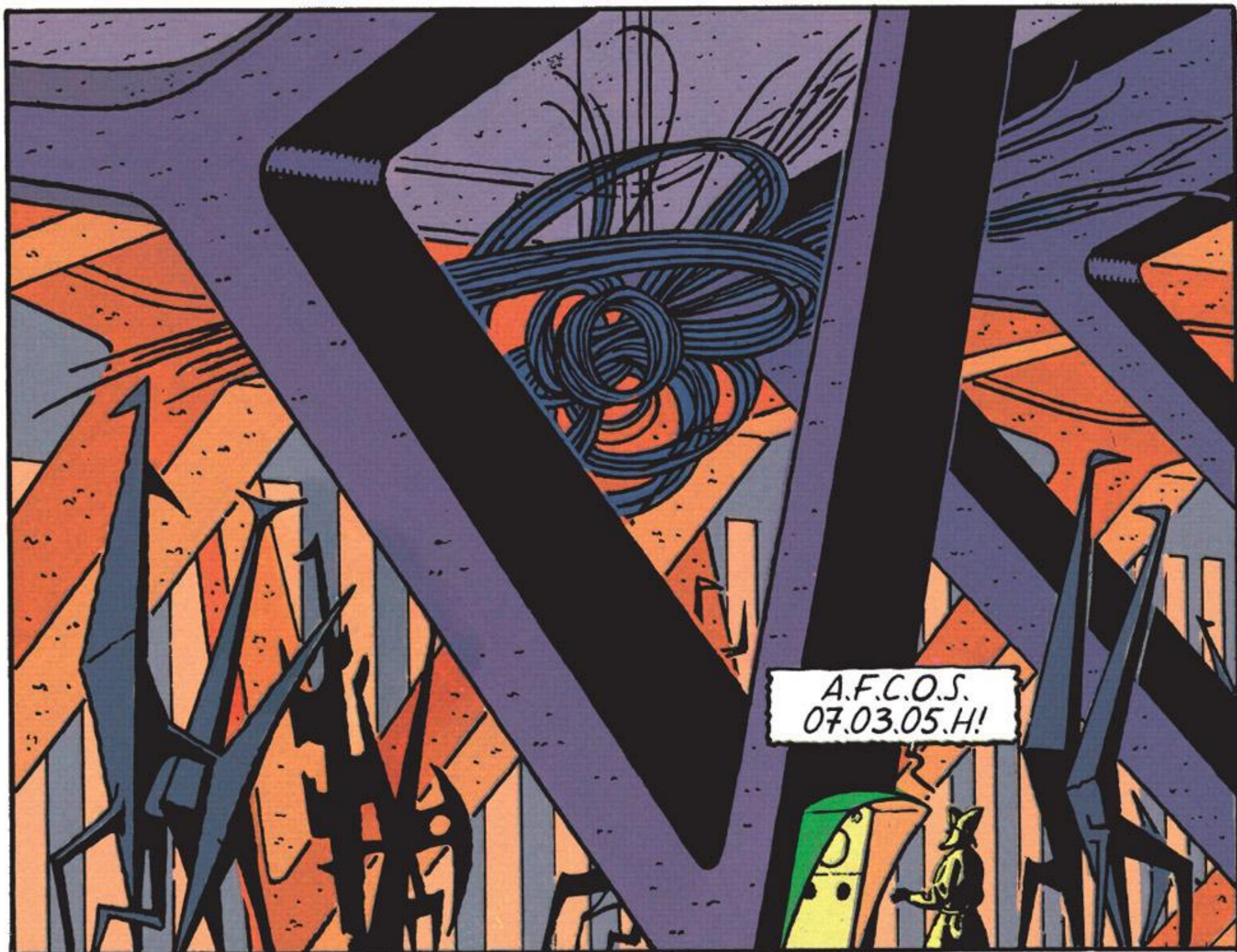
BUT WHILE, FROM HIS SCREEN, HE LOOKS ON AS FOCAS TAKES OFF FOR THE CAPITAL OF EARTH, KRISHMA WHISPERS MOCKINGLY...

Count on me, 'Master'! That answer will join all the others I intercepted behind your back!...



*TRITIUM IS PRODUCED BY IRRADIATING DEUTERIUM, ETC...

PEKING, SEAT OF THE GOVERNMENT, TWO HOURS LATER. DR FOCAS HAS PASSED THE THREE WALLS THAT PROTECT THE PALACE OF THE **SUBLIME COUNCIL**. HIDING HIS TREPIDATION, HE FINALLY ENTERS THE COMPLETELY EMPTY GREAT HALL IN ORDER TO UNDERGO THE LAST ELECTRONIC IDENTITY CHECK.



HEARING HIS ORDERS, THOUGH, HE CANNOT SUPPRESS A SHIVER...

A.F.C.O.S. correct! 07.03.05. correct!... H. correct!!... All correct - identity confirmed. The honourable Focas is expected in sector 5...



SOON, MOVING STAIRS ARE TAKING HIM TOWARDS HIS DESTINATION...

This way, honourable Focas! This way...

Sector 5. The Chamber of Truth! I'm doomed!!



AWAY FROM ANY VISIBLE HUMAN PRESENCE, GUIDED ONLY BY AN IMPERSONAL VOICE, HE THEN TRANSFERS ONTO A MECHANICAL WALKWAY THAT TAKES HIM ALONG A NARROW CORRIDOR...



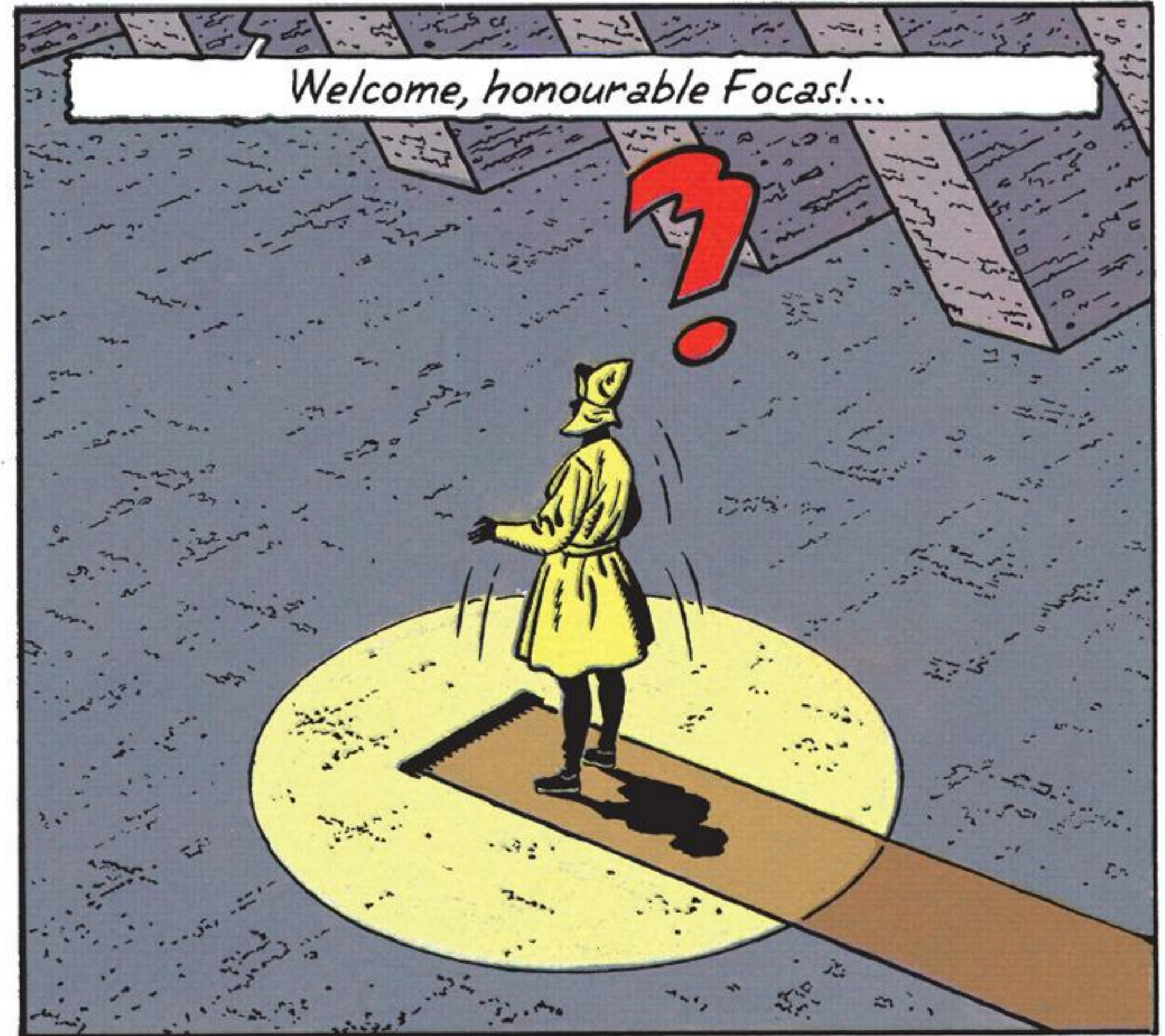
...TO A HEAVY GATE THAT OPENS TO LET HIM THROUGH... AND...

Come in, honourable Focas, come in!...



...HE ENTERS A DARKENED, STRANGELY SHAPED ROOM, WHERE THE ONLY ILLUMINATION IS A SINGLE CIRCLE OF BLINDING LIGHT. AS THE WALKWAY BRINGS HIM TO THE CIRCLE AND STOPS, THE VOICE CALLS OUT, DRIPPING WITH SARCASM...

Welcome, honourable Focas!...



WITH A TERRIFIC EFFORT OF WILL, HE MANAGES TO SPEAK...

Hail, Supreme Power! What do you require of your servant?



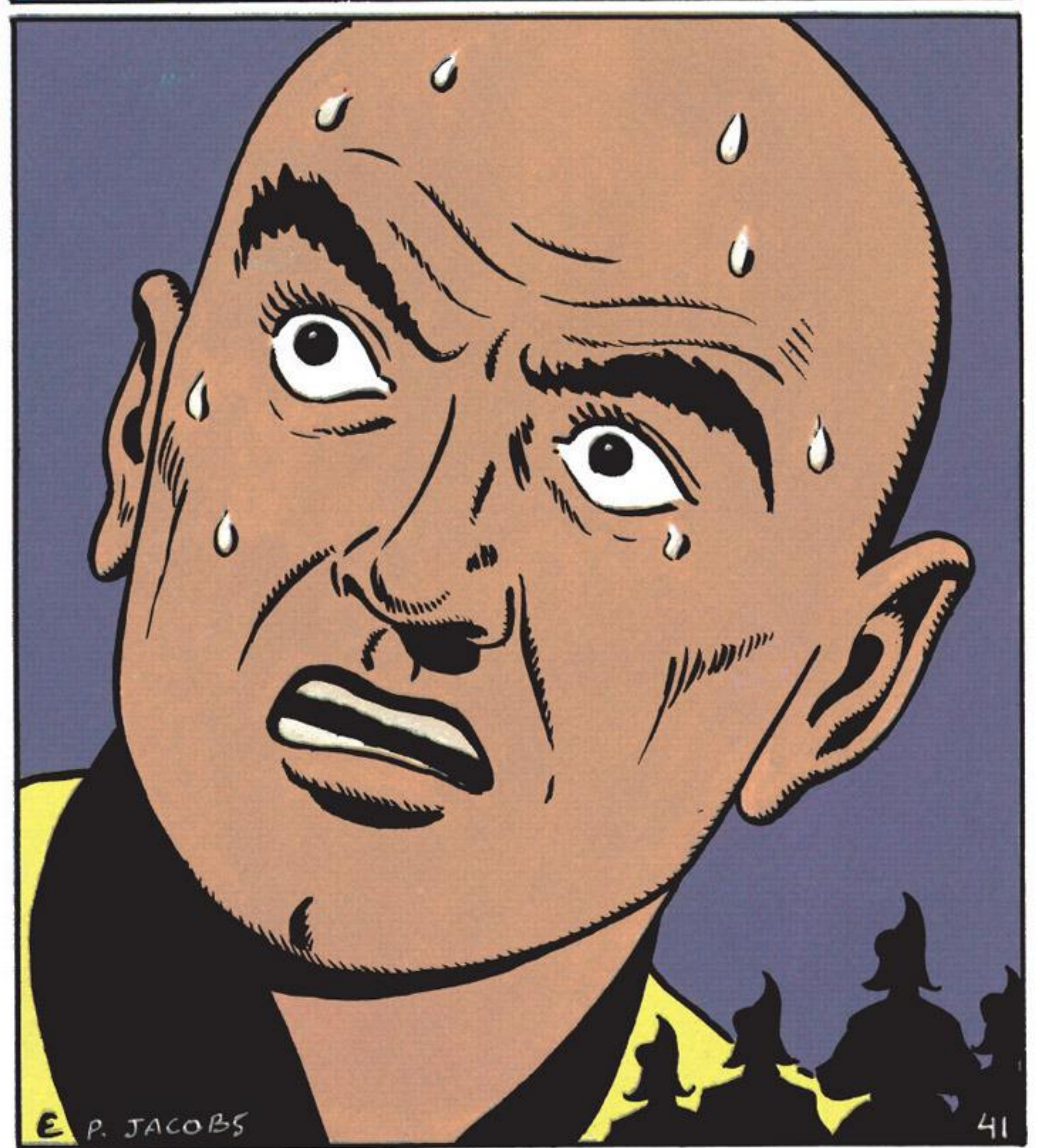
IMMEDIATELY, THE ANSWER FALLS LIKE THE EXECUTIONER'S AXE...

That you tell us what you're plotting with that red-bearded man who came from nowhere!!

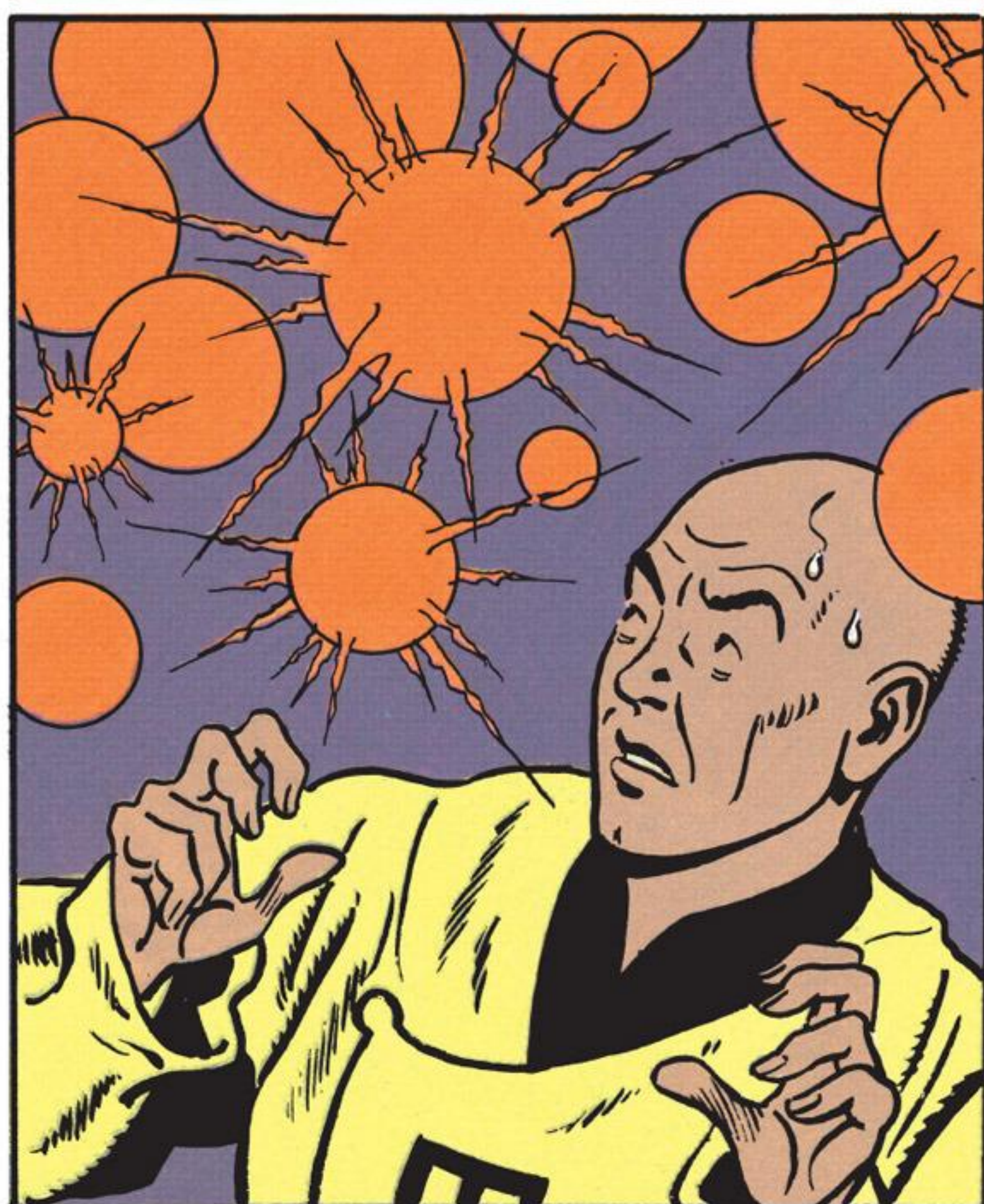


STUNNED, FOCAS DESPERATELY TRIES TO REMAIN IMPASSIVE. BUT HE DOESN'T KNOW THAT, NOT FAR FROM THERE, HIS MONSTROUSLY ENLARGED IMAGE...

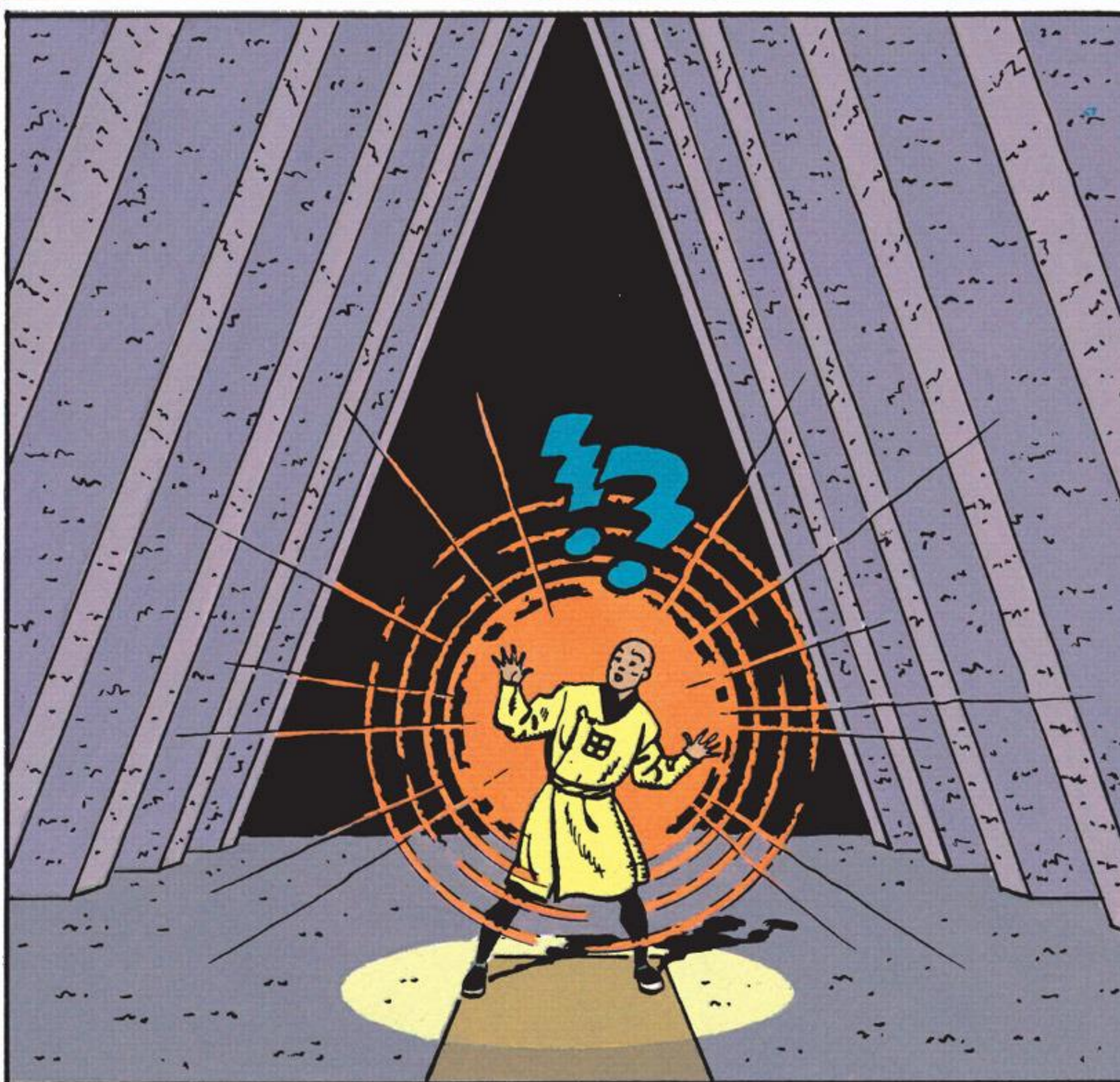
...IS BEING PROJECTED IN THREE DIMENSIONS TO HIS JUDGES, CLEARLY REVEALING HIS FEAR AND CONSTERNATION...



ALL OF A SUDDEN, FOCAS FEELS FAINT! A DRONING SOUND SURROUNDS HIM JUST AS FIERY GLOBES BEGIN DANCING BEFORE HIS EYES!...



...FEELING A HOSTILE FORCE ATTEMPT TO ANNIHILATE HIS WILL, HE OFFERS A FIERCE RESISTANCE – ULTIMATELY, ALAS, A VAIN ONE!...



...UNTIL AT LAST HE GIVES IN, DEFEATED...

I... I will tell you everything... Supreme Power!...

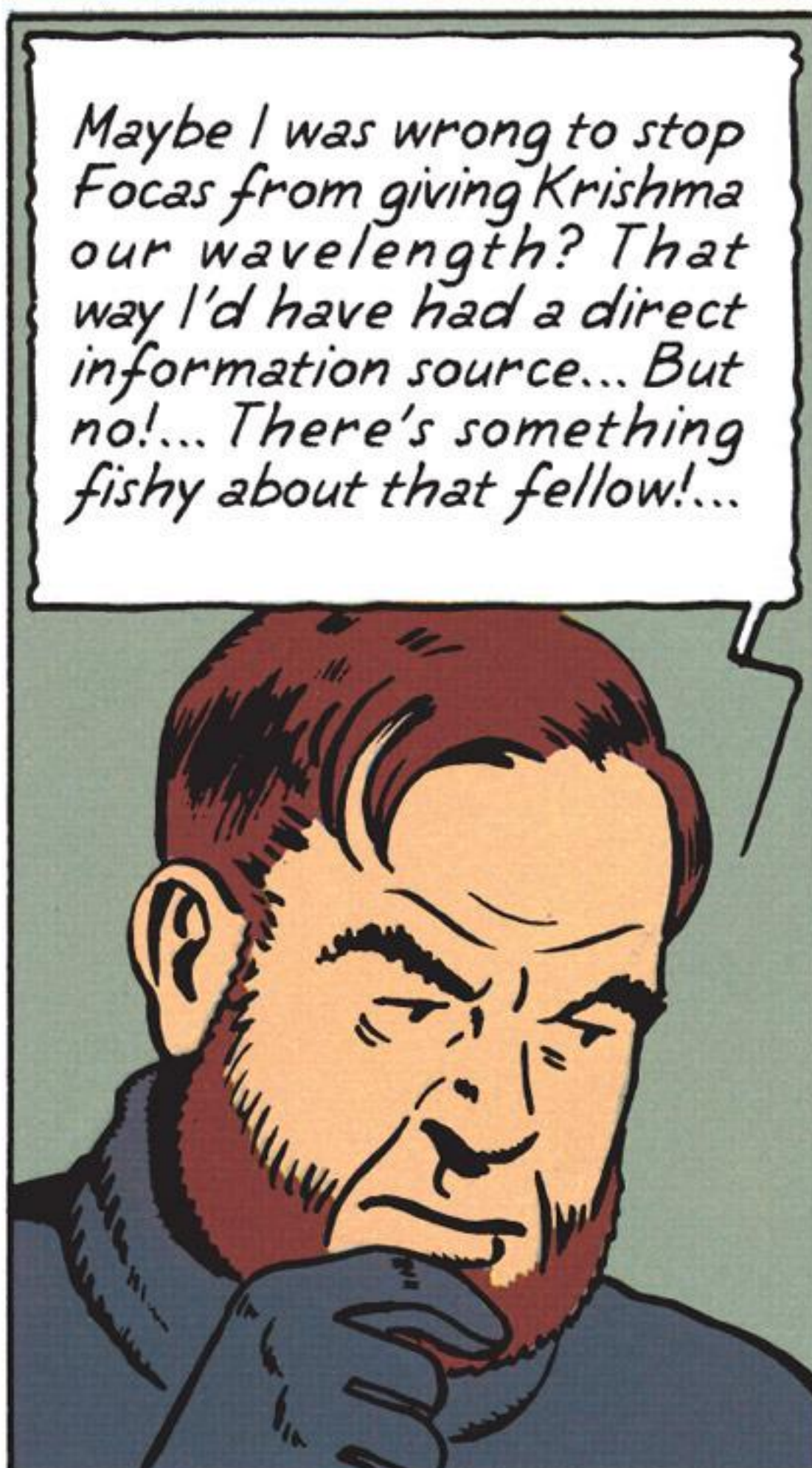


HOURS HAVE PASSED. IN THE ANCIENT NUCLEAR PLANT, MORTIMER AND HIS TEAM HAVE KEPT WORKING...



Look, my friends: this minuscule tube contains the power of a hurricane!... It's our first microbomb!!

INWARDLY, HOWEVER, THE PROFESSOR IS VERY WORRIED...



Maybe I was wrong to stop Focas from giving Krishma our wavelength? That way I'd have had a direct information source... But no!... There's something fishy about that fellow!...

THE PROFESSOR'S INTUITION IS RIGHT ON THE MARK, FOR AT THAT VERY MOMENT KRISHMA IS IN COMMUNICATION WITH THE POLICE GRAND MASTER!



Yes, Your Greatness... A message from Mars has arrived announcing that the entire planet's forces have now rallied to the liberation movement... And there's no doubt we owe it to the arrival of that mysterious Mortimer!... The decision of Mars is critical; it's clear that the off-world rebels are now ready to assault Earth!... And I have doubts about the loyalty of the crews of the orbital stations that protect our space borders!...

Find a way to delay their departure by a few hours – long enough to deal with the Earth-based rebellion... I'll call you back afterwards...

AS IF HE COULD SENSE THE DANGER, MORTIMER SUDDENLY DECIDES...



What if I tried to contact Focas directly, even in the middle of a council?... The call notification is soundless, after all, and any kind of sign would comfort me... I can't take this waiting any more – I'll do it!

AND MORTIMER PLACES HIS CALL... BUT HE RECEIVES NO ANSWER. INSIDE THE CHAMBER OF TRUTH, THE UNFORTUNATE FOCAS HAS BEEN STRIPPED OF HIS PERSONALITY BY A DEVILISH TECHNIQUE AND, PROSTRATE, IS NOW AWAITING THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIS TERRIBLE CONFESSION. THE **SUBLIME COUNCIL** HANDS DOWN ITS VERDICT!...



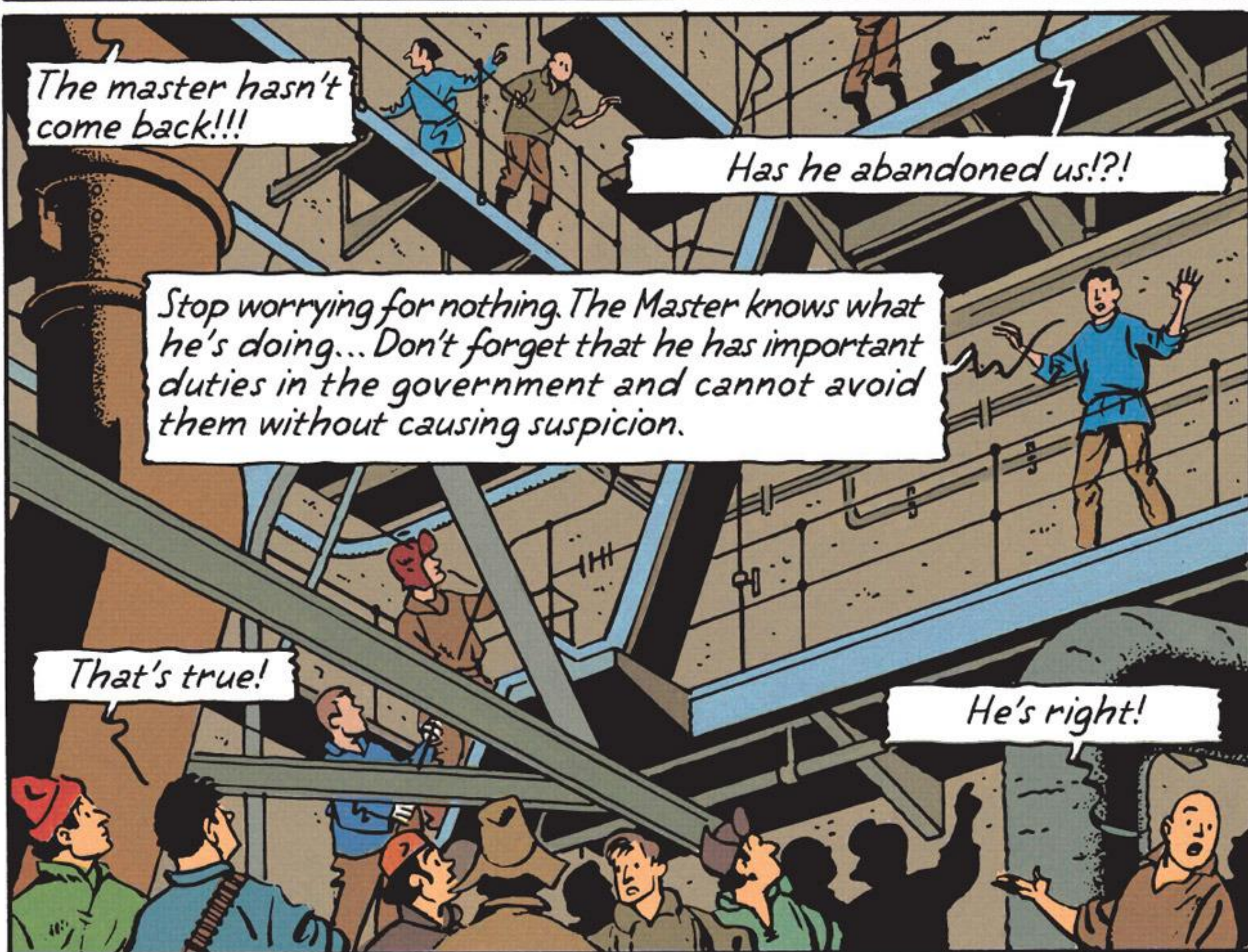
Stand up and hear our orders!!!

LIKE AN AUTOMATON, THE DOCTOR DOCILELY RISES TO HIS FEET AND SAYS...



Command me, Supreme Power... I shall obey!

MEANWHILE, IN THE UPPER LEVELS OF THE FORBIDDEN CITY, THE ATMOSPHERE IS TENSE. NEWS OF FOCAS BEING SUMMONED HAS LEAKED OUT, AND THE LEADERS ARE HAVING A HARD TIME ALLEVIATING THE SUBJECTS' WORRIES...



HOWEVER, IN THE CP, WHERE HE'S LOCKED HIMSELF UP, KRISHMA, OBEYING HIS ORDERS, IS MANOEUVRING TO DELAY THE DEPARTURE OF THE EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL FLEETS...



...WHEN THE VIBRATION OF HIS PIT CALLS HIS ATTENTION...



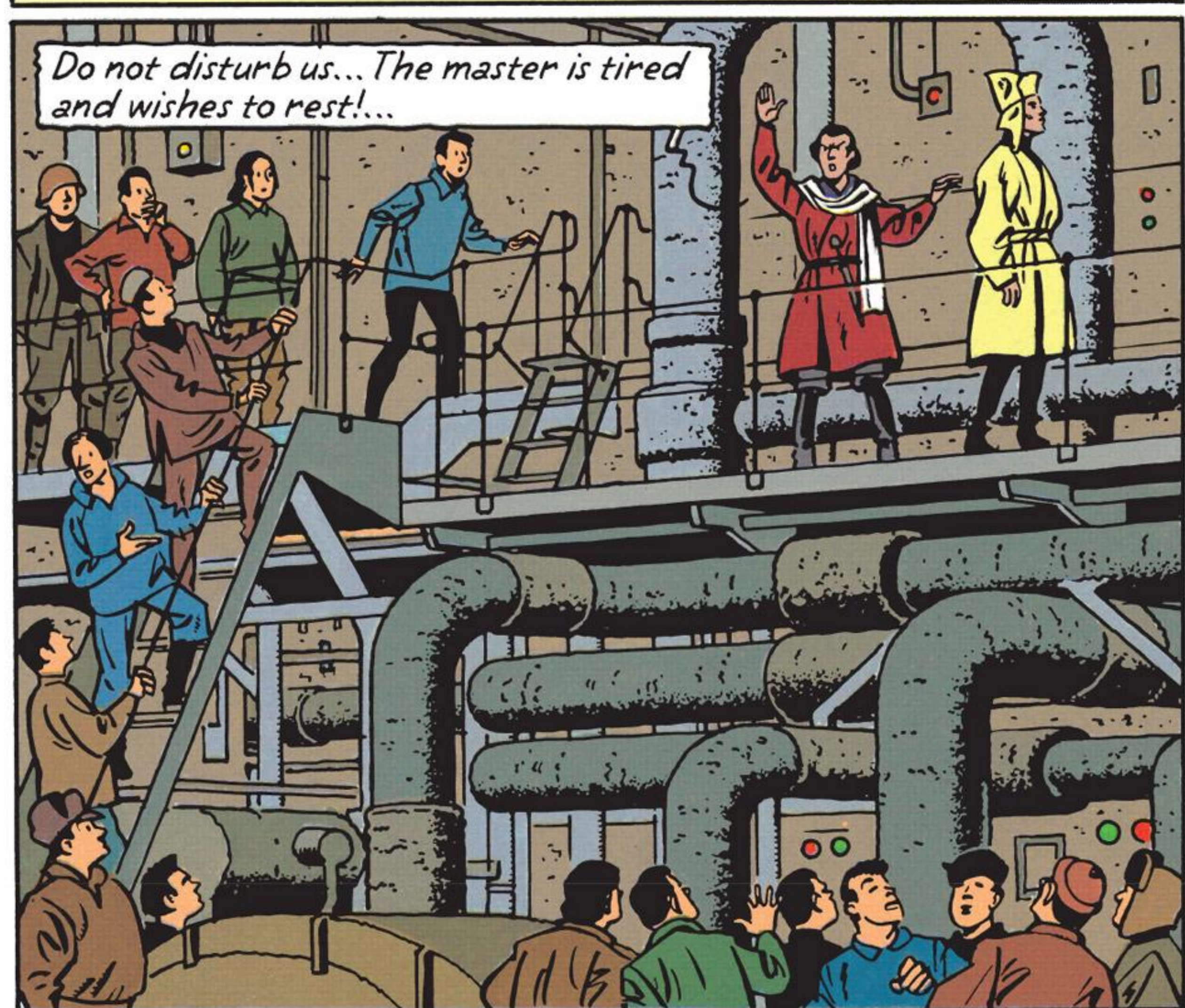
NO SOONER HAS HE FINISHED THAN A GREAT CHEER GOES UP OUTSIDE, HERALDING THE RETURN OF FOCAS. BUT THE MASTER'S ONLY RESPONSE TO HIS FOLLOWERS' ENTHUSIASM IS A STRANGE SILENCE. HE SIMPLY STANDS THERE STARING AHEAD, EYES UNFOCUSED, EXPRESSIONLESS, IMPASSIVE AND DISTANT...



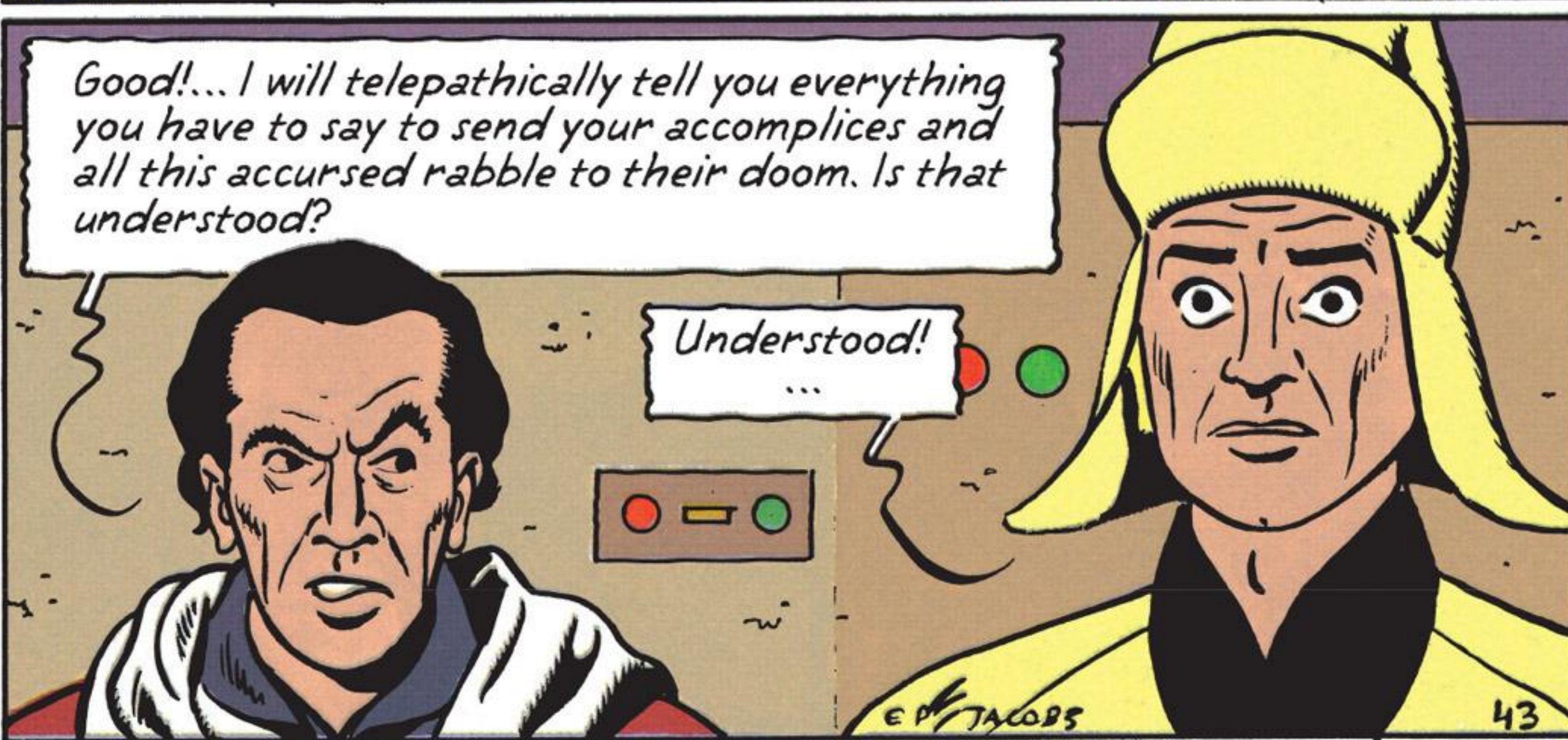
BUT KRISHMA HAS RUSHED TO HIS COMMANDER'S SIDE...



WORDLESSLY, GUIDED BY HIS SECOND-IN-COMMAND, FOCAS HEADS TO THE CP AS THE SURPRISED CROWD PARTS IN SILENCE...



BUT THE DOOR HAS BARELY CLOSED WHEN KRISHMA DROPS HIS RESPECTFUL ACT AND HISSES...



HAVING ENSURED THAT FOCAS IS WELL AND TRULY INDOCTRINATED, KRISHMA CONTINUES...

Summon the commanders and announce an immediate sortie... Since it's impossible to crush the core of the rebellion here without damaging the Cosmos power plant built over the city, I'll lead your troops to a place where they'll be scientifically exterminated... With me so far?...

I'm with you...

Then you will order the insurgents of Tokyo, London, New York, Mumbai and Vladivostok to come out of their holes so they can suffer the same fate as their accomplices in Paris. That way, when the space rebels arrive, they'll be caught by surprise and destroyed on the spot!... And all of that, courtesy of the loyal collaboration of the Liberation Movement's supreme leader! Ha! Ha! Ha!

Ha! Ha! Ha!

POINTING AT A PAIR OF WAR SUITS TAKEN FROM THE POLICE ARSENAL, KRISHMA ADDS...

But first of all, you and I are going to put on this equipment. It's invulnerable to normal weapons. Your life is too valuable to us ... for the moment at least!

AN HOUR LATER, HAVING ANSWERED FOCAS'S SUMMONS, THE MAIN LEADERS OF THE INSURRECTION ARE GATHERED IN THE CITY'S COMMAND POST.

But, Focas, such a sortie is madness!

What can we do without modern weapons!?!...

And shouldn't we wait for the Liberator?

Enough!!!

I give orders here! Know that our allies from the other planets and the orbital stations are about to join us, and that this operation is done with the Liberator's approval and in close coordination with similar manoeuvres that will take place throughout the world!...

COWED INTO OBEDIENCE, THE REBEL COMMANDERS RUSH OFF TO MOBILISE THEIR TROOPS...

To arms!

To arms!

To arms!

To arms!

MEANWHILE, AN INCREASINGLY WORRIED MORTIMER HAS SENT ONE OF HIS AIDES TO GET NEWS - AND THE MAN IS NOW RUNNING BACK, ALMOST FRANTIC...

Master! Dr Focas is back, and he's just ordered a general sortie!...

What!? Are you sure about that?

Absolutely! Our men are already climbing towards the exits!...

Heavens! Has he gone mad? Attacking police robots with primitive weapons when we're churning out bombs down here!... I have to stop this!

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AND, WASTING NO TIME, MORTIMER CALLS FOCAS ONCE MORE...

THIS TIME, DR FOCAS APPEARS ON THE TINY SCREEN RIGHT AWAY, AND SAYS JUST AS QUICKLY:

Oh, it's you! I don't have time to chat... Stay out of this!

DUMBOUNDED, MORTIMER STILL MANAGES TO ANSWER...

Come now, Doctor, this operation is pure madness!!

How dare you discuss my orders!?

HOWEVER, REALISING THAT HE HAS CAUSED FOCAS TO GO TOO FAR, KRISHMA MENTALLY DICTATES NEW, PLACATING WORDS TO HIM...

...Er... Please forgive my sharpness... The last few hours have been rough ... and my nerves are a bit frayed...

I understand... Still...

Please, don't insist! Later you will understand. In the meantime, stay where you are and do not try anything! Is that clear?

Very well, I yield...

Good. I'll see you soon!...

SUDDENLY A SUBCONSCIOUS THOUGHT COALESCE...

Wait a minute - why the devil didn't he use his call sign?... Could it mean...?

AND THE COMMUNICATION ENDS, LEAVING MORTIMER NONPLUSSED...

Hmm!... Strange!... That weird look in his eyes... And that harsh tone... It's so unlike him!...

FRANTICALLY, HE TRIES TO CALL FOCAS BACK ... IN VAIN!

Nothing!?! Gah! There's something fishy going on - I'm sure of it...

THEN HE MAKES HIS DECISION...

Quickly, chaps! Grab your weapons and all the microbombs already assembled, and let's go!... Our friends are in danger!!!

IN RESPONSE TO THE PROFESSOR'S CALL, HIS MEN EQUIP THEMSELVES IN NO TIME AND RUSH TO THE LIFTS!

BUT THE CONTROLS REMAIN STUBBORNLY UNRESPONSIVE...



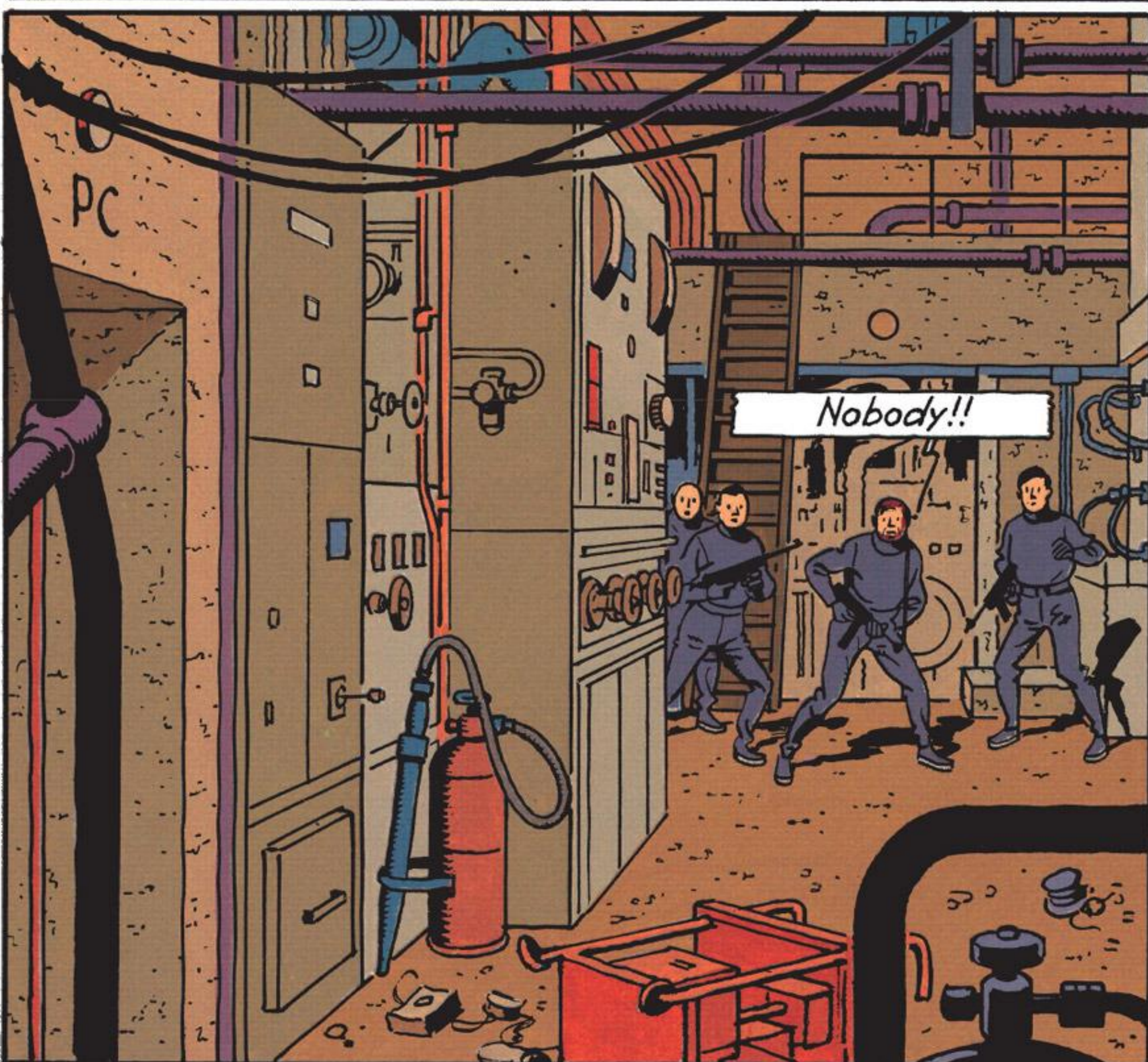
To the stairs, quick!! Follow me!!!



AND THE SMALL PARTY BEGINS THE LONG TREK THROUGH THE MAZE OF THE FORBIDDEN CITY...



BUT WHEN AFTER A BREATHLESS ASCENT THEY FINALLY REACH THE SUBJECTS' QUARTERS AND FOCAS'S CP, THEY TURN OUT TO BE ENTIRELY DESERTED!



IN THE HEAVY SILENCE, MORTIMER SUDDENLY NOTICES THE MYSTERIOUS POUNDING THAT HAD GUIDED HIM UPON HIS ARRIVAL IN THIS STRANGE WORLD...



THE SUBJECT'S EXPLANATION IS CUT SHORT BY ANOTHER'S CRY...



JUST THEN, SEVERAL SMALL, TRANSLUCENT DISCS SLIP OUT OF KRISHMA'S COAT...



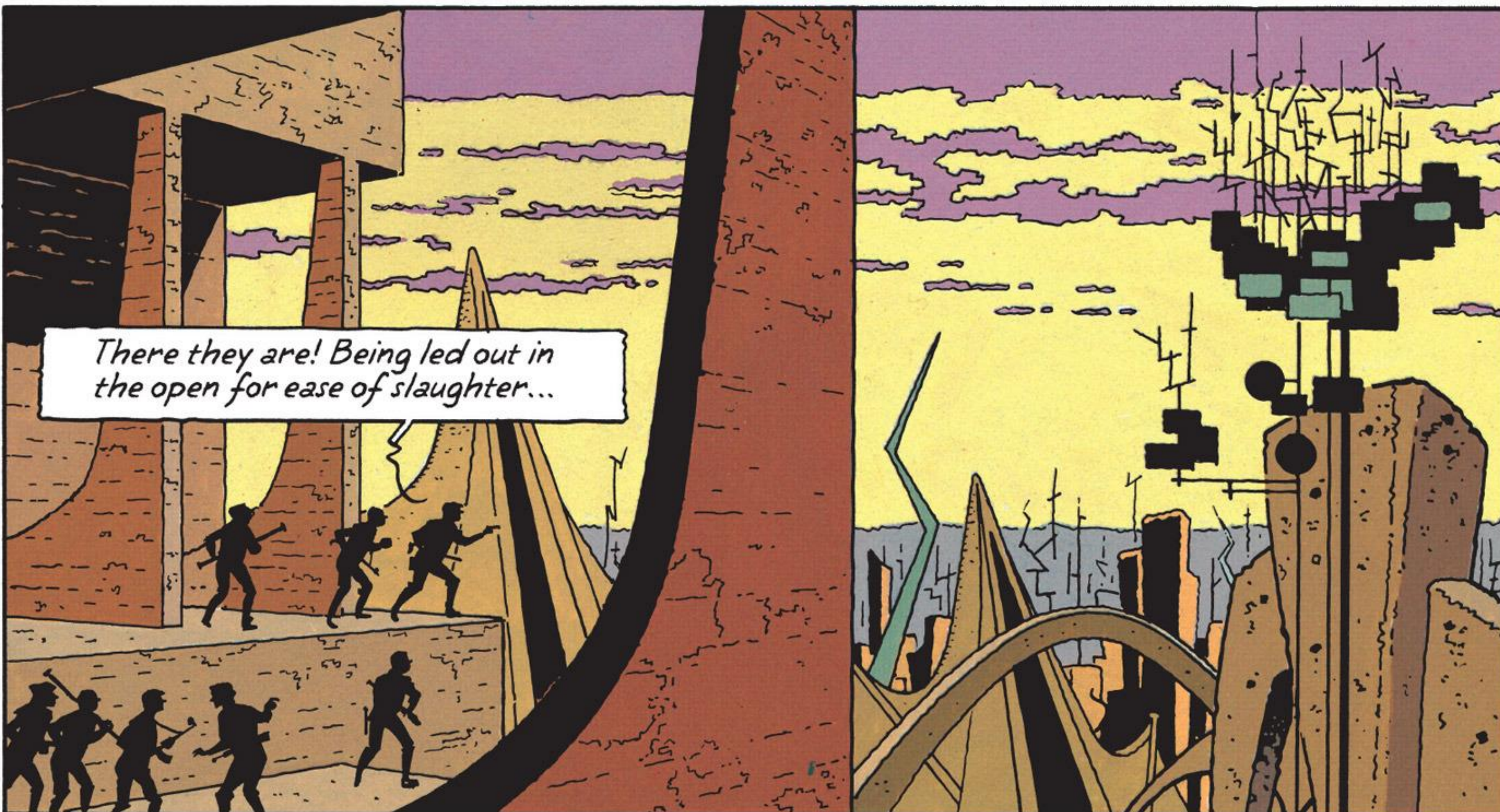
What!?!... Police beacons! Curse him! So he was the traitor who kept marking our nuclear plant!!!



PROMPTLY REALISING THE FULL EXTENT OF THE DISASTER AWAITING THE SUBJECTS, THE PROFESSOR DASHES TOWARDS THE MAIN EXIT FOLLOWED BY HIS MEN...



AND ALL AT ONCE THEY'RE OUTSIDE, IN A NIGHTMARISH LANDSCAPE DOMINATED BY THE ENORMOUS MASS OF **COSMOS**. IN THE DISTANCE, A LONG LINE OF SUBJECTS STRETCHES OUT...



There they are! Being led out in the open for ease of slaughter...

CERTAIN THAT USING HIS PIT WOULD YIELD NO RESULT BUT DESPERATELY WANTING TO ATTRACT THE ARMY'S ATTENTION, MORTIMER FIRES HIS GUN INTO THE AIR...



SURPRISED, A FEW MEN FROM THE REARGUARD LOOK BACK...



TAKING IN A MIGHTY BREATH, MORTIMER BELLOWS:



He says we've been betrayed!!!

Betrayed!?!?

THE NEWS LEAPS FROM MOUTH TO MOUTH ALL THE WAY TO THE VANGUARD, CAUSING THE COLUMN TO WAVER. SEEING THIS, KRISHMA, THROUGH FOCAS, BARKS ORDERS...



BUT NEITHER COMMANDS NOR SCOLDINGS STOP THE SUBJECTS FROM BREAKING RANKS TO MEET THE PROFESSOR AS HE RUNS FORWARD, FOLLOWED BY HIS OWN MEN...



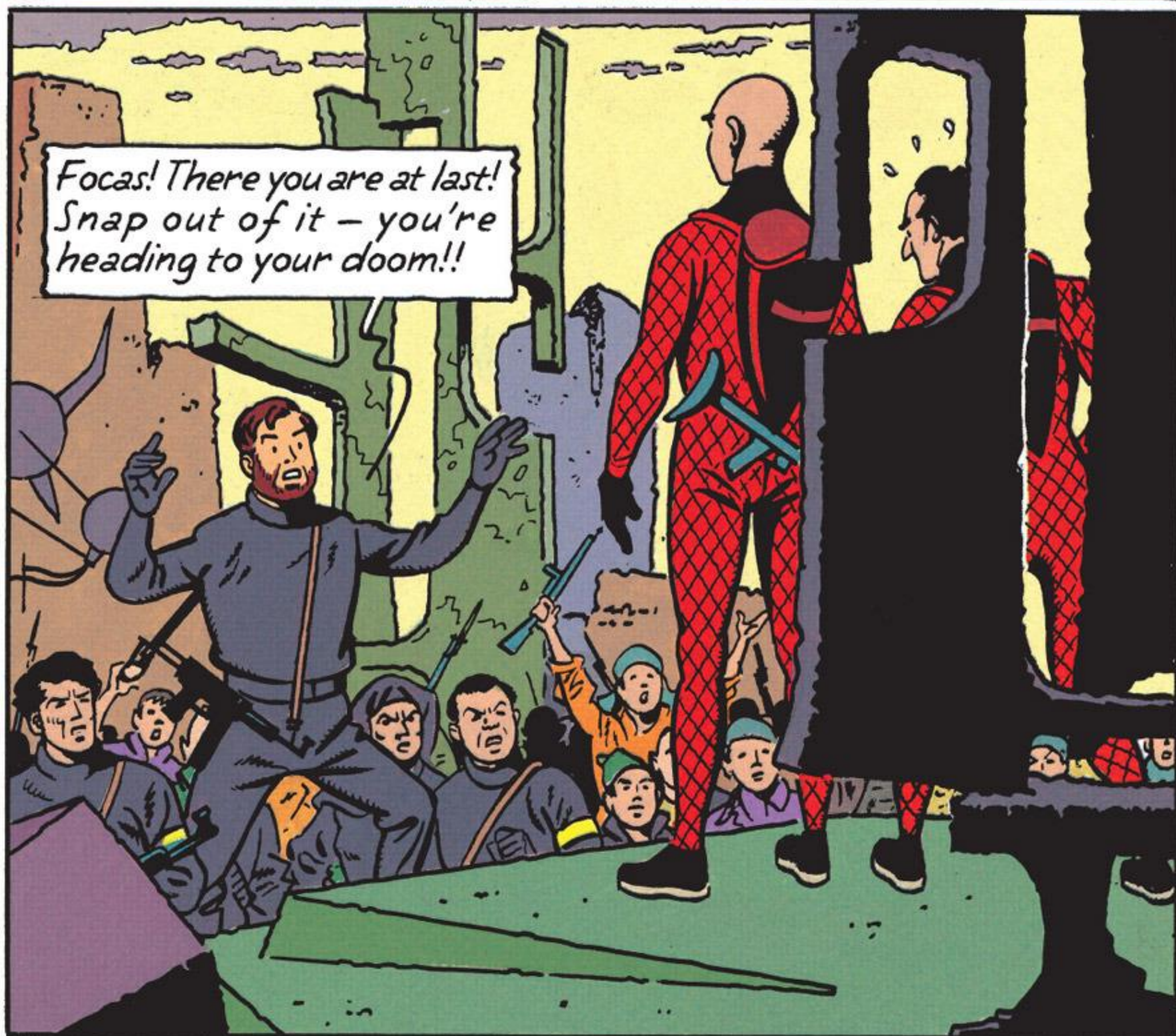
IN A DESPERATE EFFORT TO REGAIN CONTROL OF HIS TROOPS, KRISHMA THUNDERS...



BUT IN ANSWER TO HIS THREATS, A SINGLE WORD ROLLS AND SWELLS, LIKE THE ROAR OF AN ANGRY SEA...



IN THE MEANTIME, MORTIMER AND HIS GROUP HAVE MANAGED TO PUSH THEIR WAY THROUGH THE CONFUSED SOLDIERS TO THE FRONT OF THE COLUMN...



A STIFF FOCAS ANSWERS HARSHLY...



No, Focas!... You're being manipulated by a traitor!... This traitor right here!!



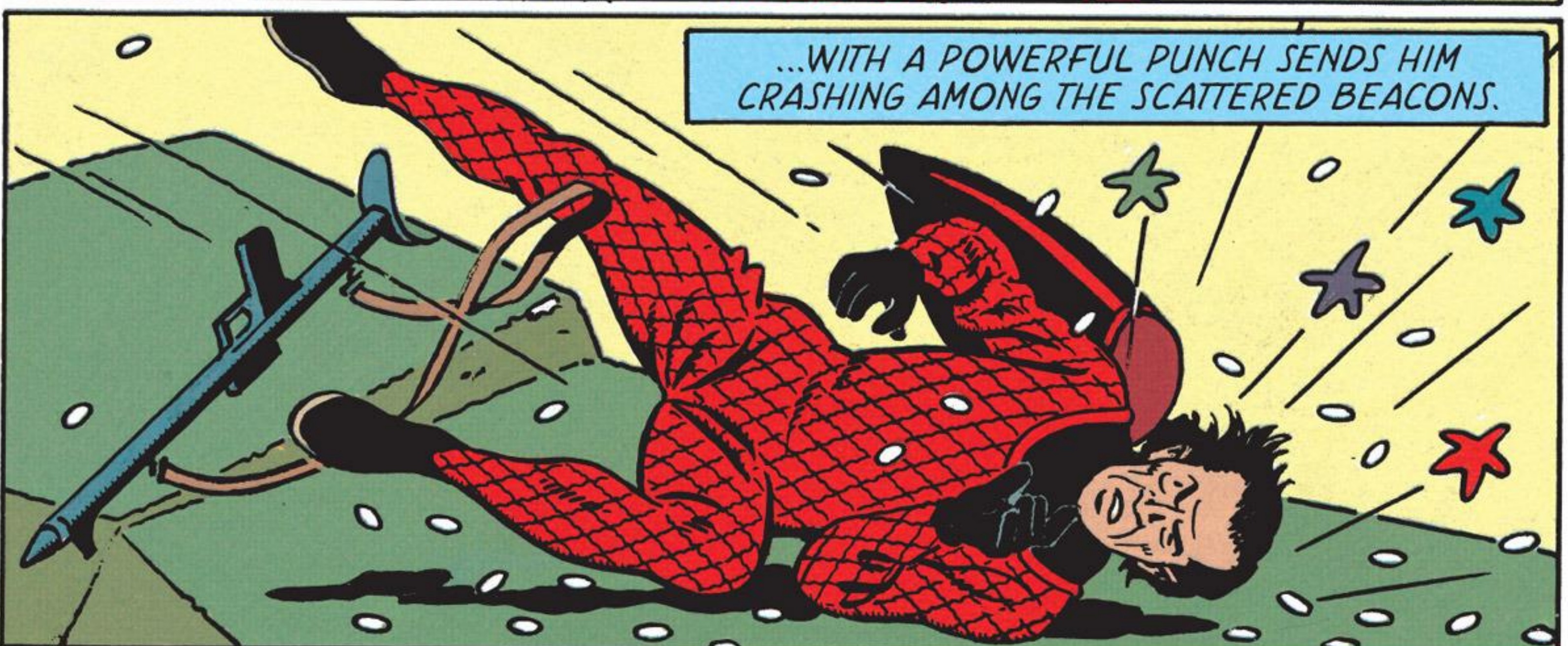
THE PROFESSOR, FILLED WITH COLD FURY, THROWS A HANDFUL OF THE BEACONS – DAMNING EVIDENCE! – TO THE WRETCH'S FACE...



LIVID, KRISHMA TRIES TO GRAB HIS WEAPON, BUT MORTIMER IS FASTER AND...



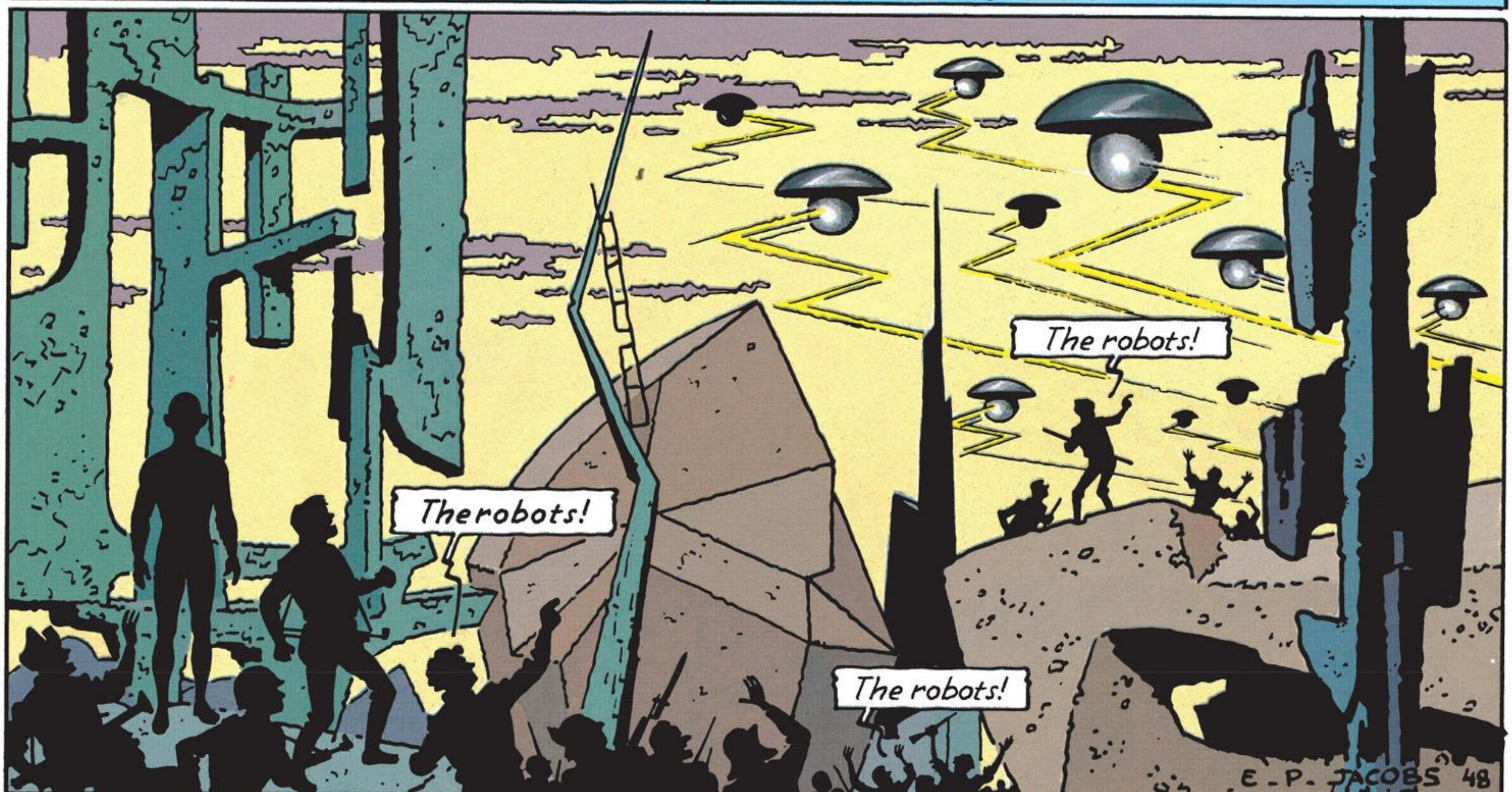
...WITH A POWERFUL PUNCH SENDS HIM CRASHING AMONG THE SCATTERED BEACONS.



GRIMACING IN ANGER, THE TRAITOR RAISES HIS HEAD, PUTS AN ULTRASOUND WHISTLE TO HIS LIPS AND GIVES THE SIGNAL.



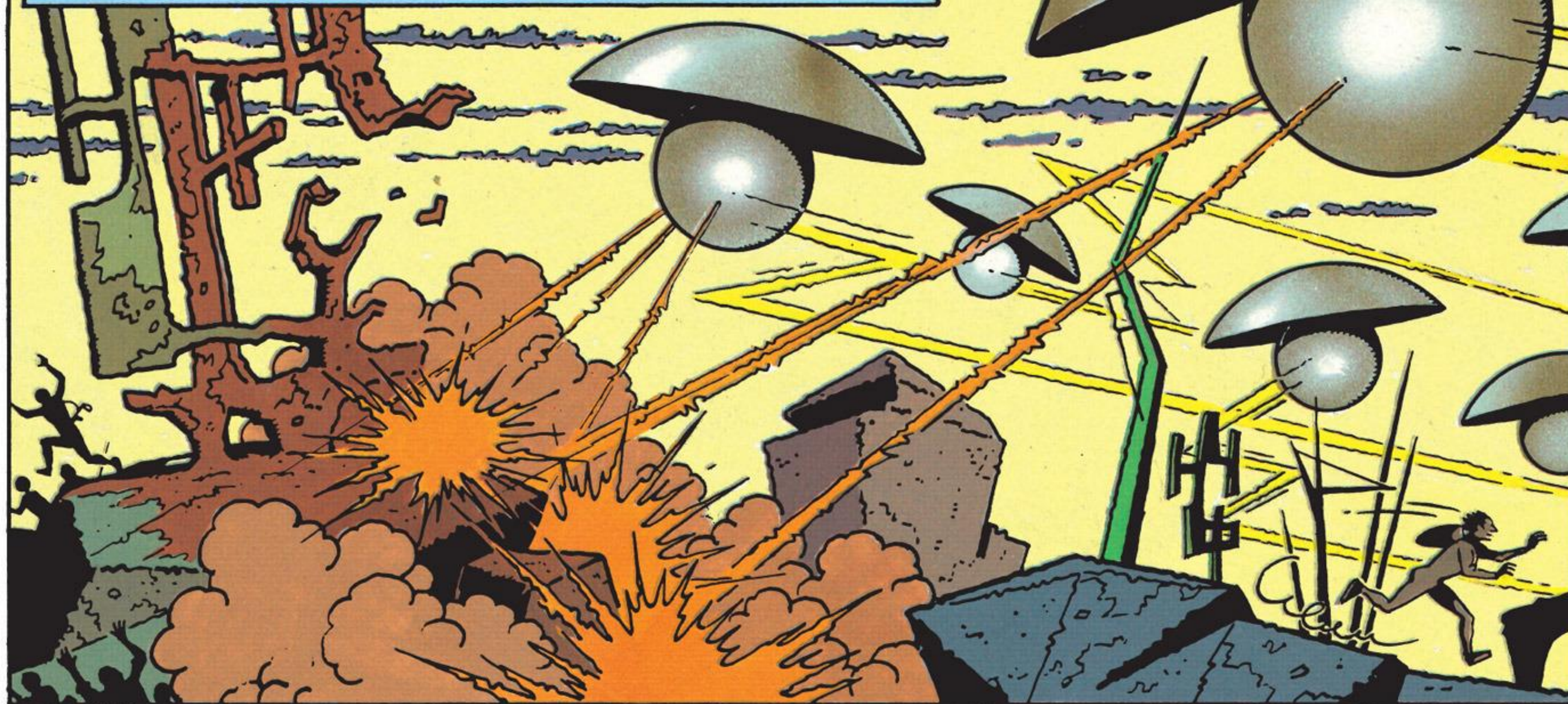
ANSWERING THE PRE-PROGRAMMED CALL, POLICE ROBOTS APPEAR IMMEDIATELY AND, ZIGZAGGING CURIOUSLY, ADVANCE ON THE SUBJECTS!!



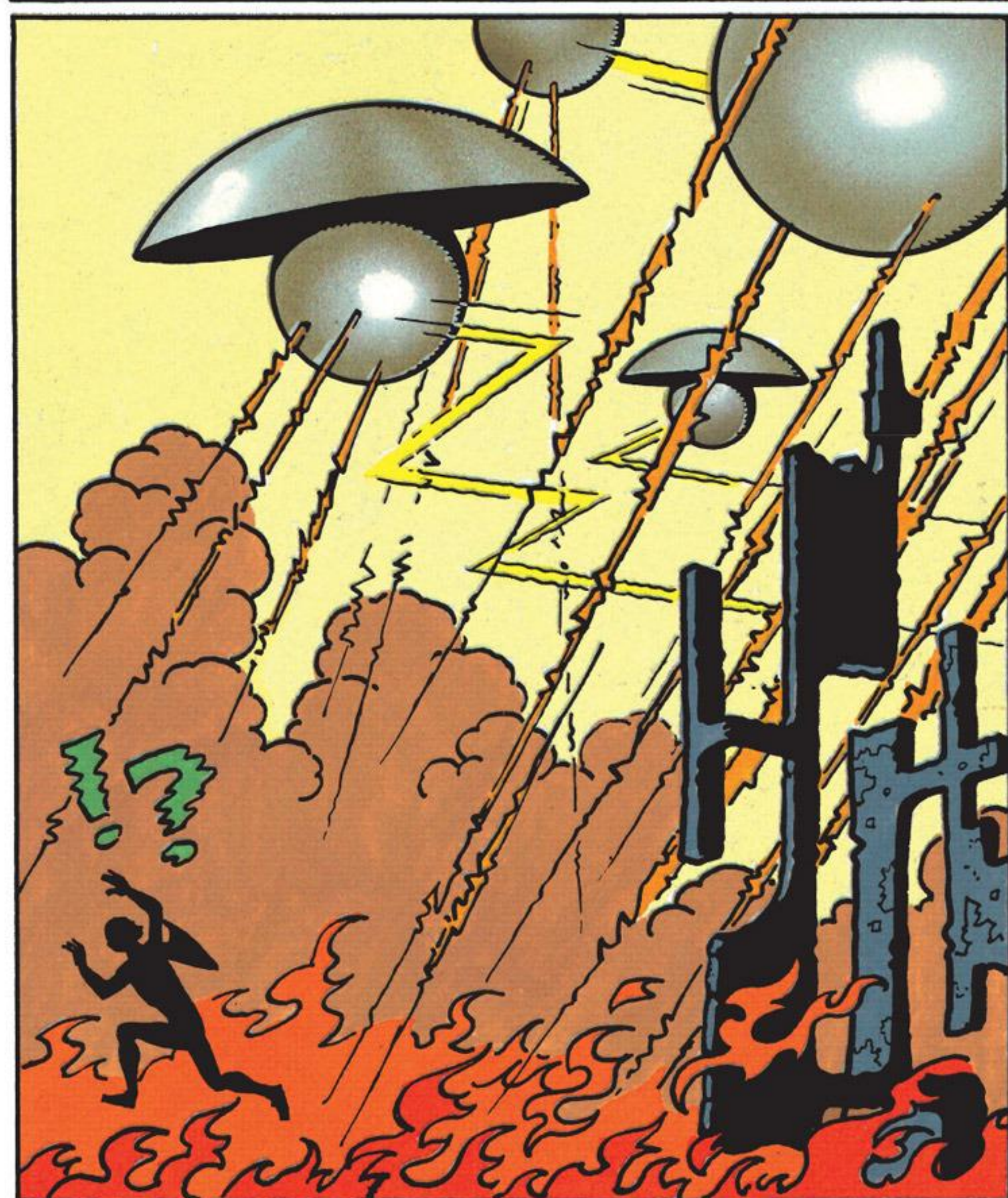
TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE CONSTERNATION CAUSED BY THE ARRIVAL OF THE ROBOTS, KRISHMA SPRINGS TO HIS FEET AND SCURRIES TO MEET THEM...



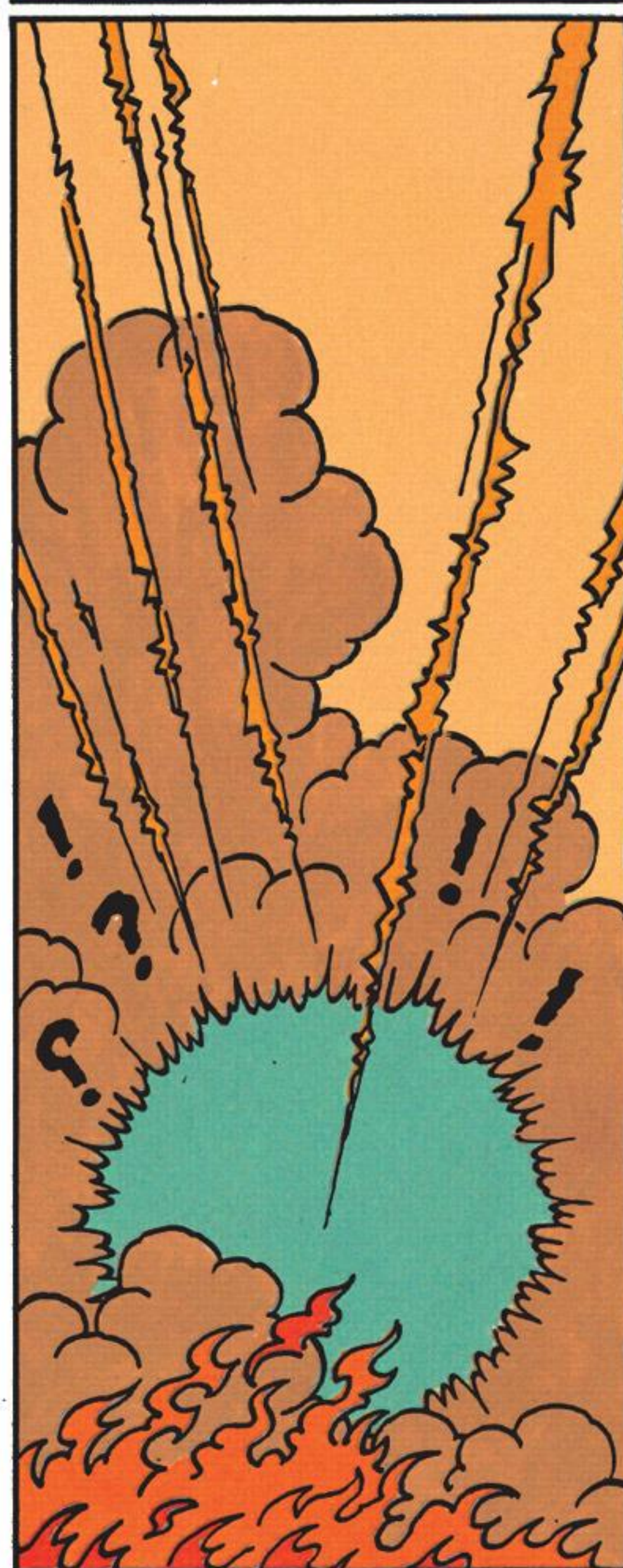
REACHING OPTIMAL RANGE, THE MACHINES OPEN FIRE. BUT INSTEAD OF STRIKING THE SUBJECTS, THEIR DISINTEGRATORS ARE FOCUSED ON THE BEACONS SPREAD ON THE GROUND, THEIR TARGETING SYSTEMS DISRUPTED BY THE UNEXPECTED PRESENCE OF THE MAGNETIC DISCS...



...THEN, AFTER THIS UNFORESEEN DIVERSION, THEY TURN THEIR WRATH UPON KRISHMA, IRRESISTIBLY ATTRACTED TO THE FEW DEADLY BEACONS STUCK IN THE UNSUSPECTING TRAITOR'S HAIR...



...UNTIL INEVITABLY...



THE VERY MOMENT THAT KRISHMA IS ANNIHILATED, FOCAS, SUDDENLY FREED FROM HIS CONTROL, RECOVERS HIS SENSES...



Ah, Mortimer!.. What happened?!

You must've been in a hypnotic state!



Yes, that's it!... That is indeed one of their favourite tricks!... But what have I done? I...

Later!... Right now we need to take shelter!

AND SEEING THAT THE ROBOTS, TEMPORARILY DEPRIVED OF ORDERS AFTER KRISHMA'S DEATH, ARE SIMPLY FLOATING, INERT, MORTIMER SHOUTS:

Quick, to Cosmos! They won't dare attack the plant!



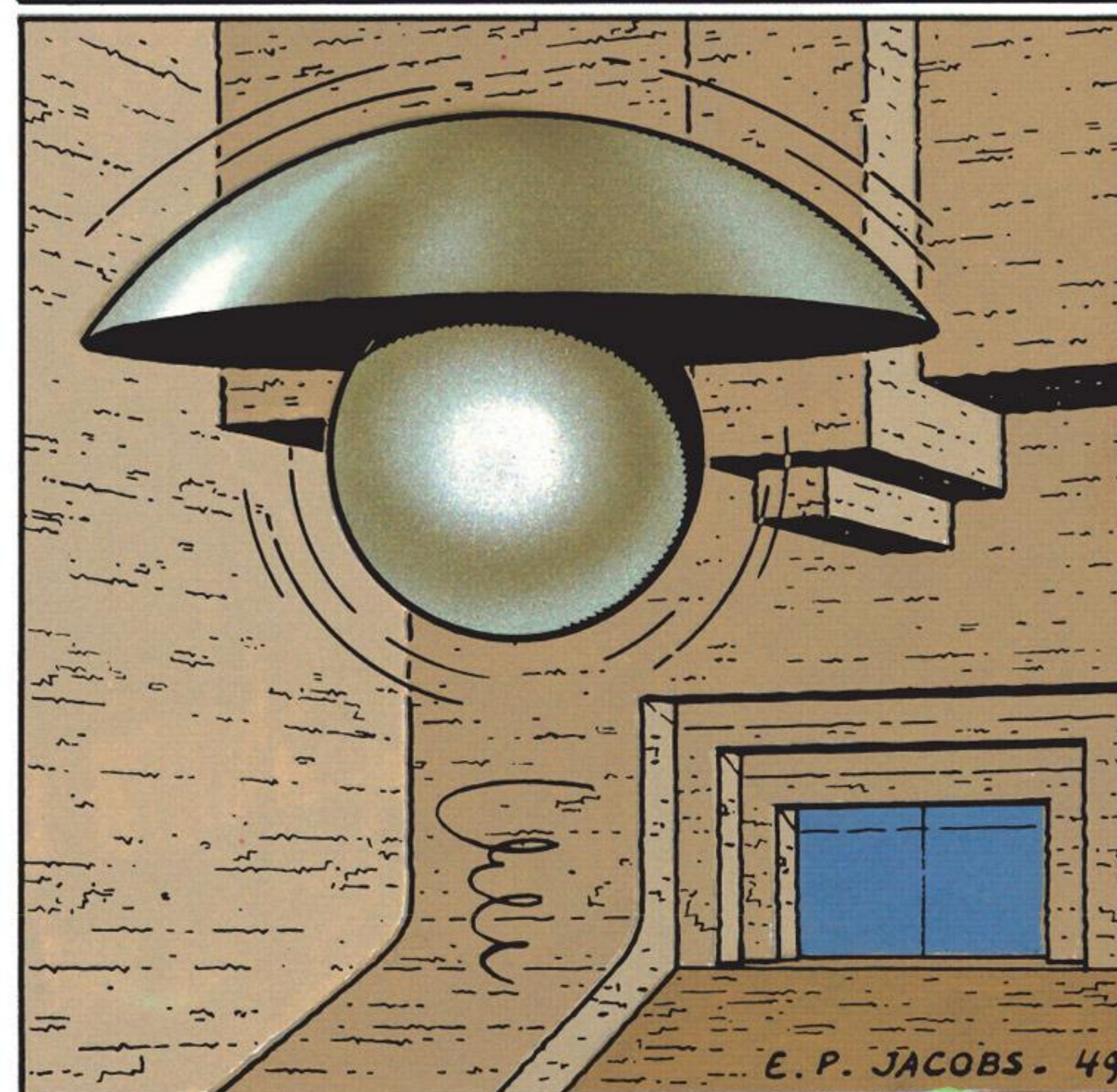
THE TROOPS OBEY HIS VOICE. FOCAS, POINTING AT THE TRAITOR'S INTACT - AND EMPTY - WAR SUIT, TELLS THE PROFESSOR:

Mortimer, take this!... It protects against disintegrators!...

Right you are. A pity Krishma wasn't wearing his helmet!...

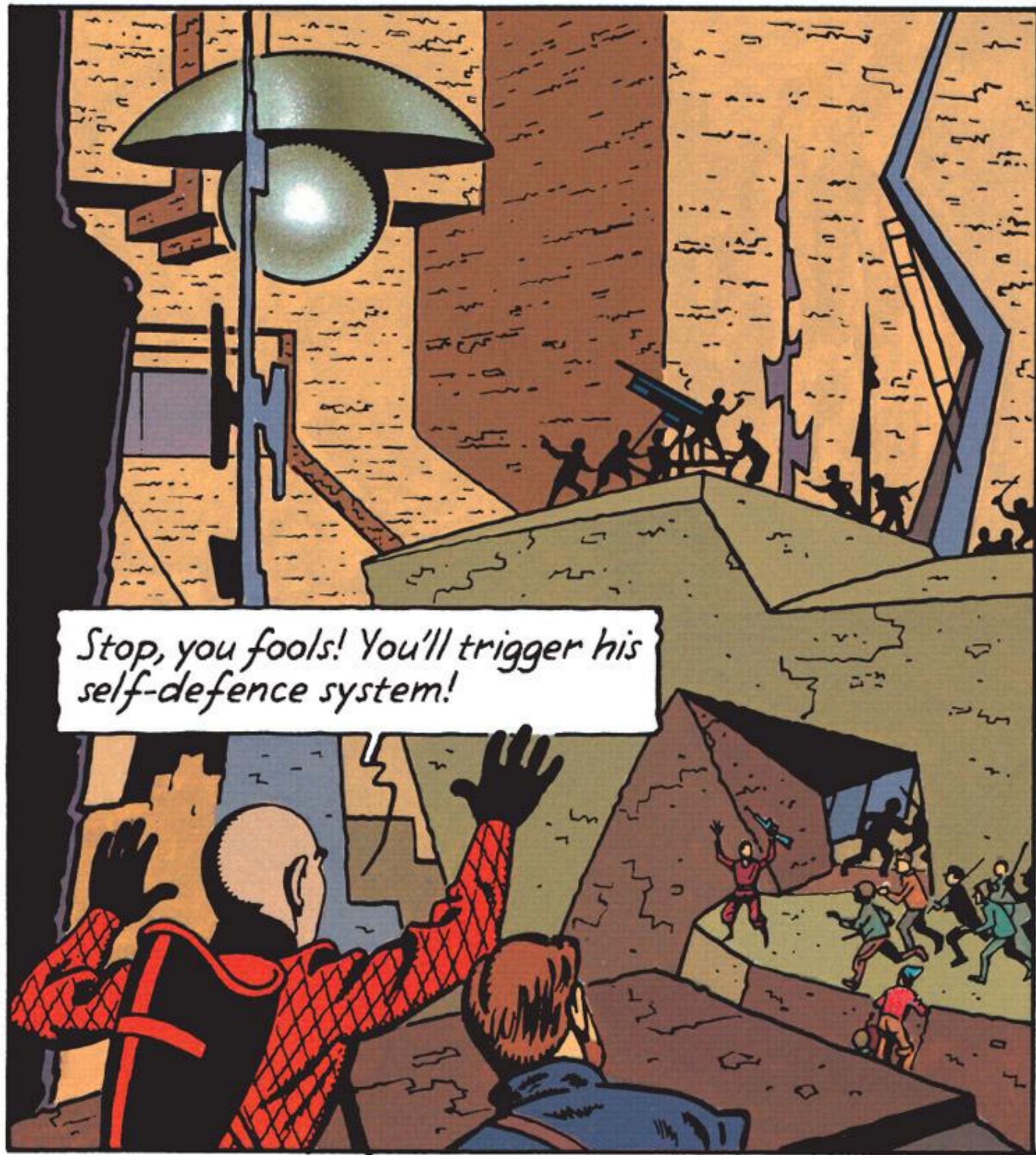


BUT WHEN, FOLLOWING THEIR COMPANIONS, THEY ARRIVE IN SIGHT OF COSMOS, A ROBOT IS THERE, WAITING FOR THEM ABOVE THE CLOSED DOOR!...



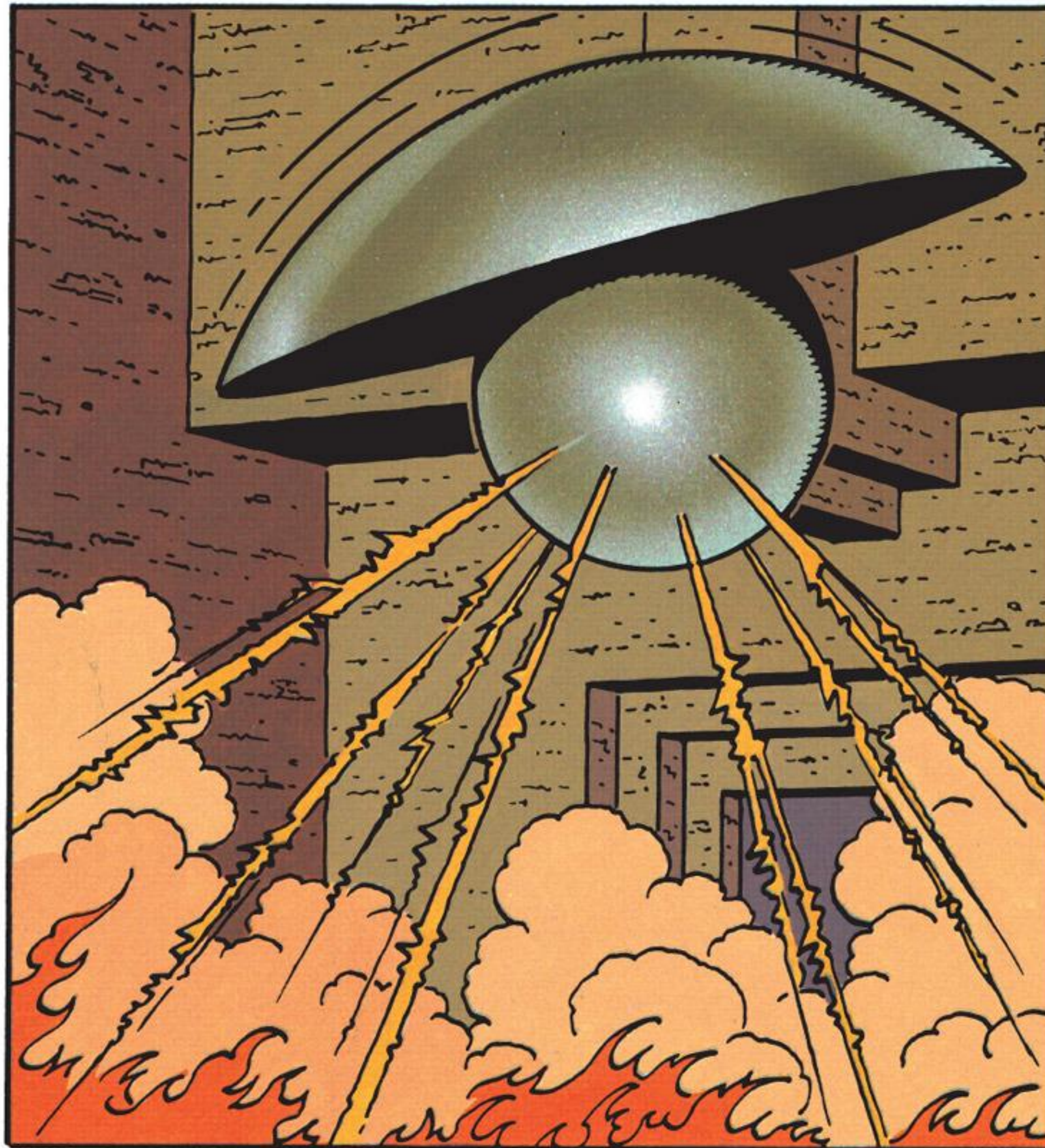
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MEANWHILE, A FEW OF THE SUBJECTS HAVE ALREADY SET UP A ROCKET LAUNCHER.



Stop, you fools! You'll trigger his self-defence system!

TOO LATE! WITH THE FIRST PROJECTILE THE ROBOT IMMEDIATELY RESPONDS IN KIND, FORCING THE ATTACKERS TO RETREAT IN DISARRAY...



WHILE THE SUBJECTS SCATTER, FOCAS AND MORTIMER THROW THEMSELVES BEHIND A WALL.



How can we force our way through?

We can use one of the microbombs!... Quick, help me put on this suit!

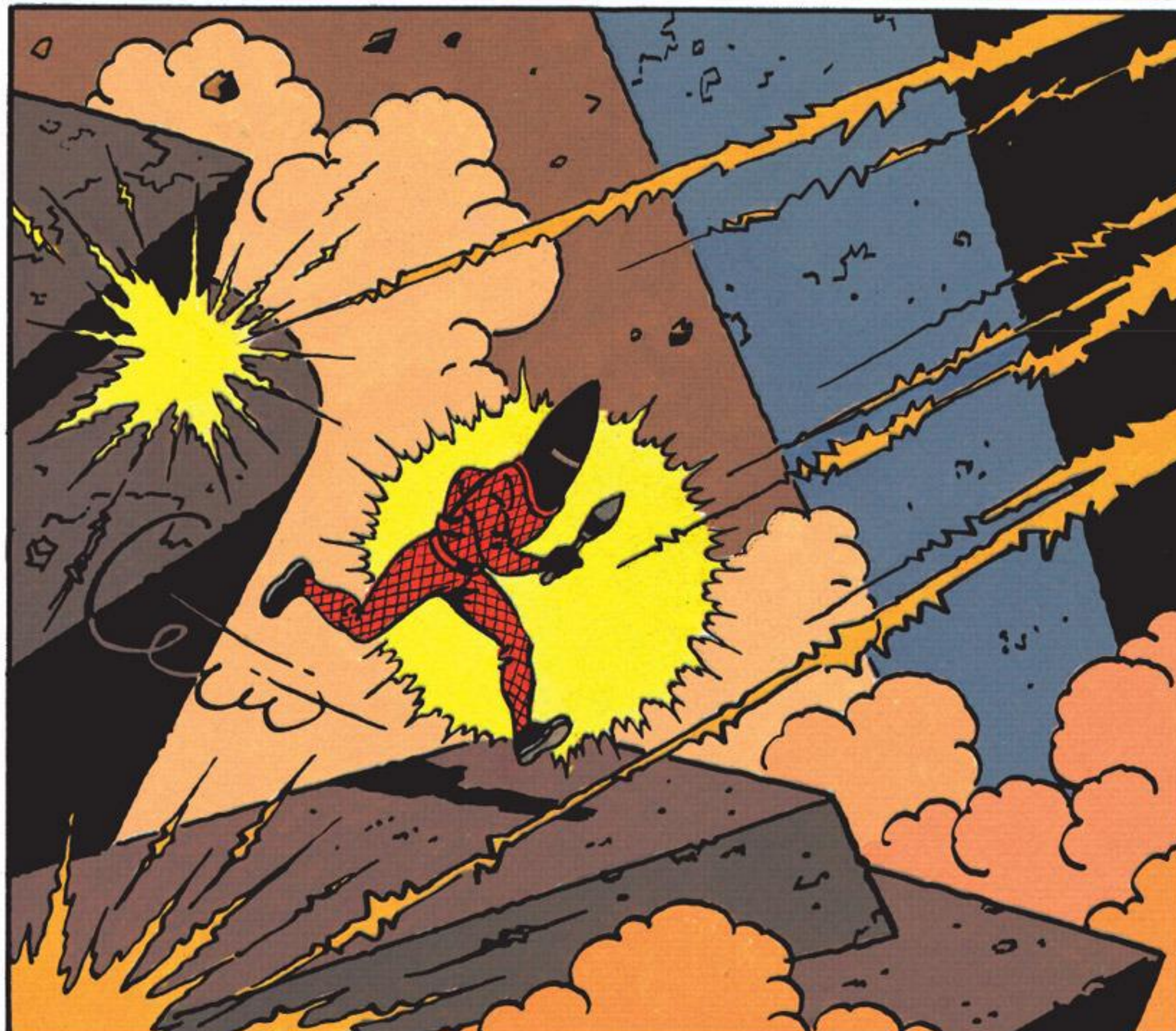
A FEW MOMENTS LATER, HASTILY EQUIPPED, MORTIMER IS ABOUT TO FACE THE ROBOT AND THE DEADLY FIRE IT'S STILL HURLING!...



What about the radiations?

We don't have a choice! Besides, it's a 'clean bomb'. If they're quick about it, our men won't be affected by the fallout.

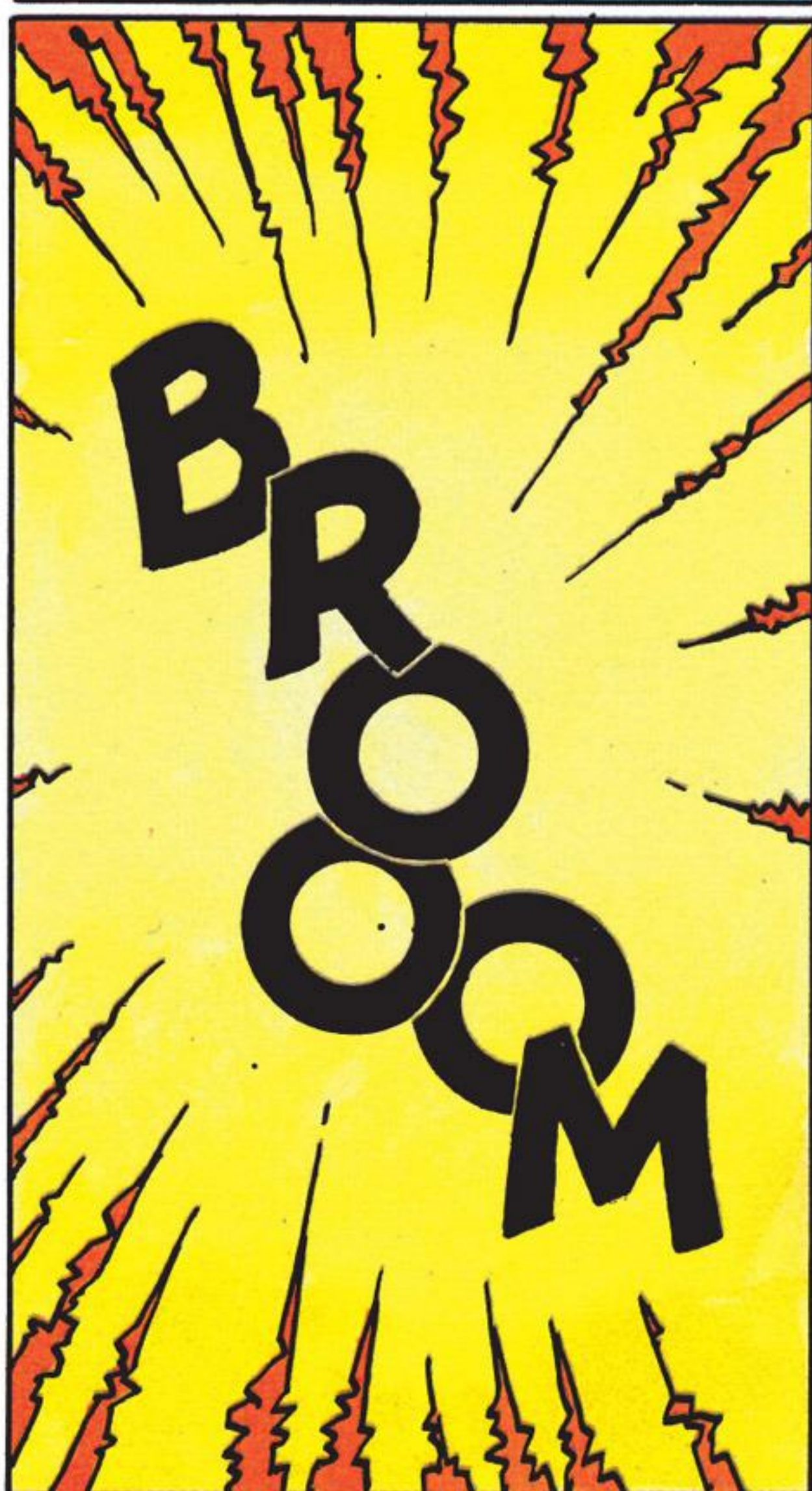
AND WITH THOSE WORDS OUR HERO LEAPS OUT OF HIS HIDING PLACE TO CHARGE AT THE ROBOT. ONE OF THE INCANDESCENT BEAMS SPLASHES INEFFECTIVELY AGAINST HIS SUIT...



...BUT MORTIMER IS NOW IN THROWING RANGE...



...AND...



BY THE TIME THE PROFESSOR IS READY TO RISK COMING OUT OF THE HOLE HE'S JUMPED INTO, A MUSHROOM CLOUD HAS REPLACED THE OBLITERATED ROBOT, AND AN ENTRANCE GAPES BEFORE HIM, BEHIND THE GUTTED DOOR...



Everyone, this way!!

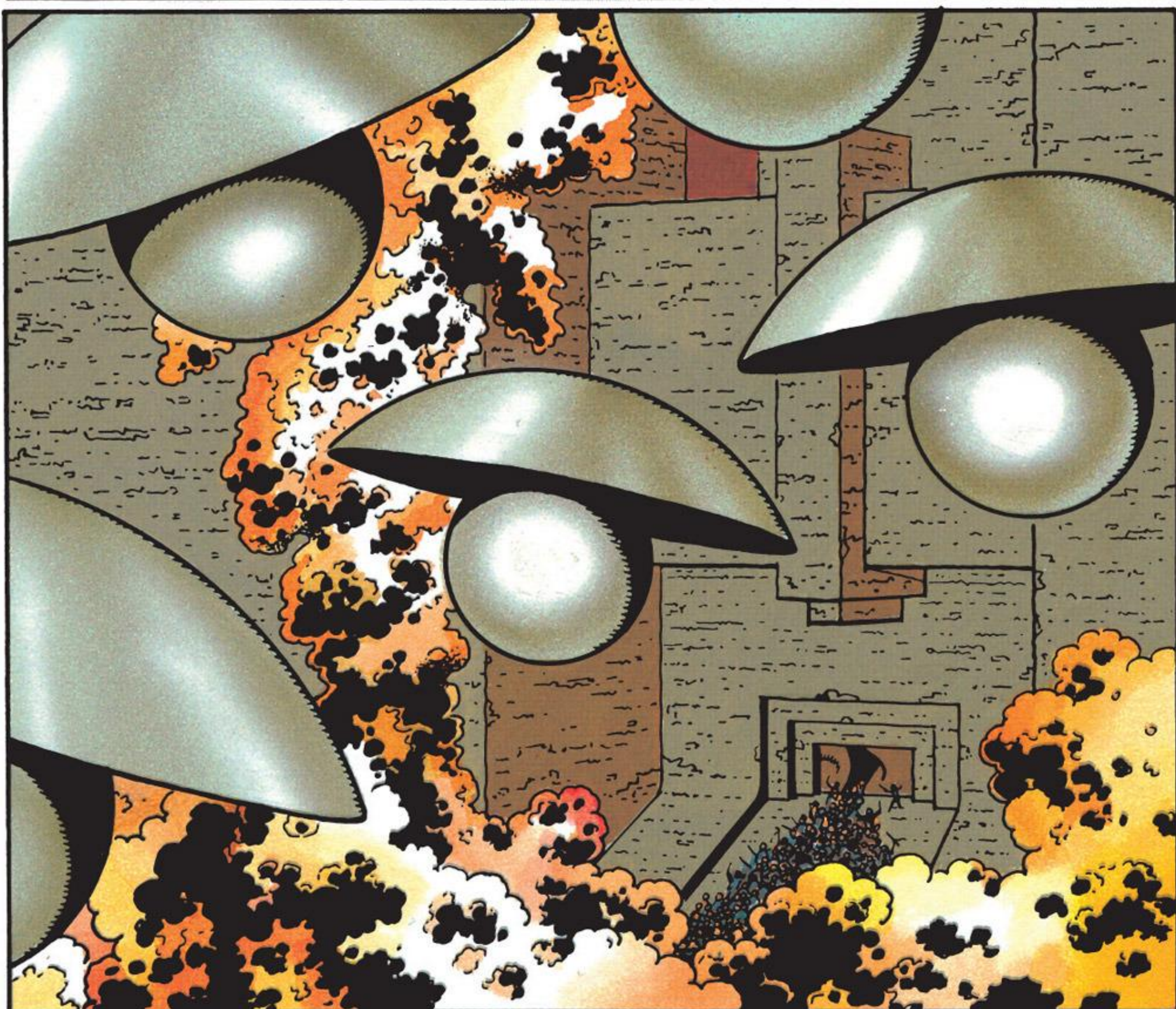
AT THAT MOMENT, SOMEONE SCREAMS:



They're coming back!!!

E. P. JACOBS

INDEED! RALLIED AT LAST, THE ROBOTS ARE APPROACHING IN CLOSE FORMATION...



Heavens! If they reach Cosmos before us, it'll be a slaughter!

Yes!... But how to stop them from here? The range...



SUDDENLY, MORTIMER GRABS A FLEEING SOLDIER'S BAZOOKA...

Give me that!!



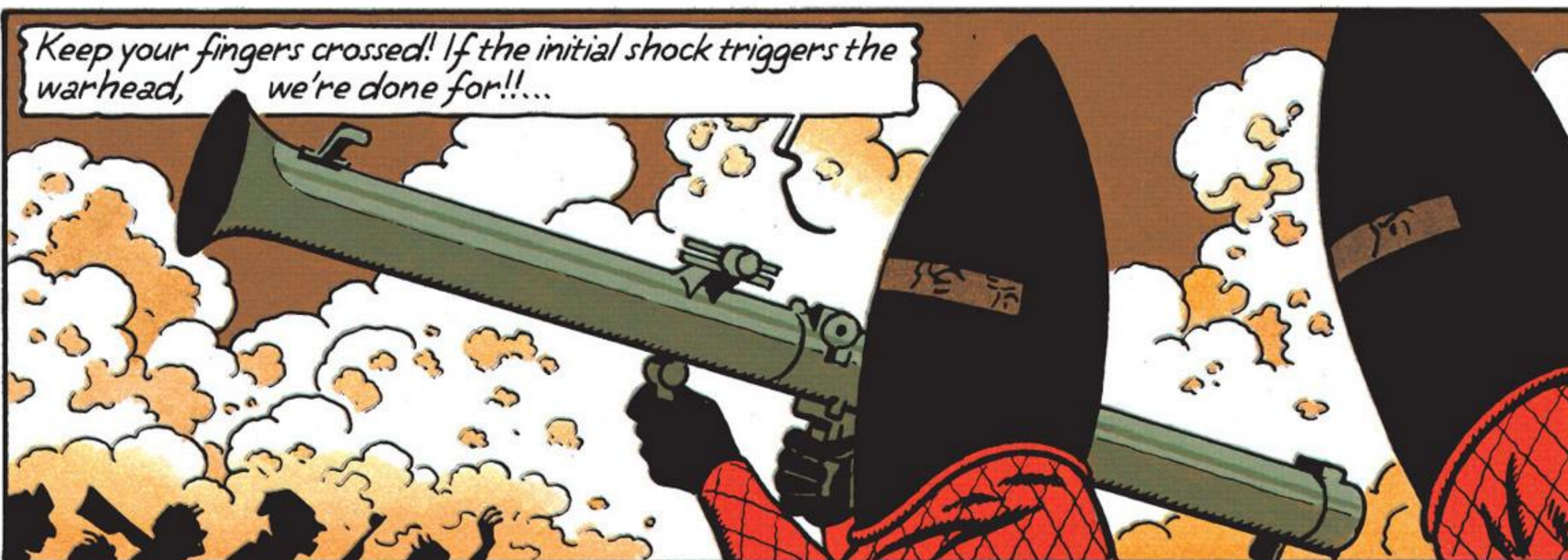
What are you doing?!

Something crazy, but...



AS HE SPEAKS, MORTIMER SLIDES A MICROBOMB INTO THE WEAPON'S MOUTH, NESTLING IT AGAINST THE ROCKET, ALREADY LOADED... THEN...

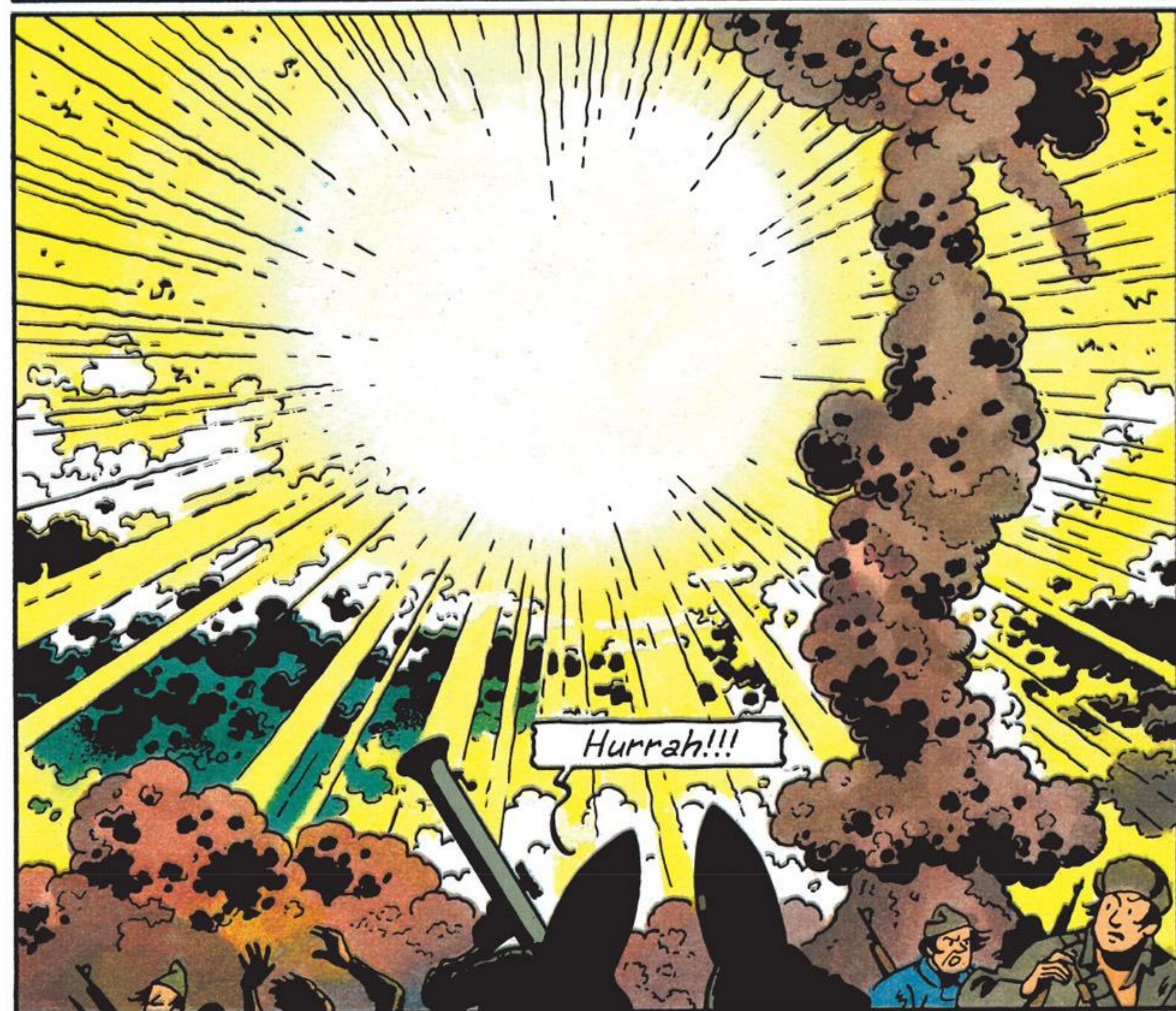
Keep your fingers crossed! If the initial shock triggers the warhead, we're done for!!...



...AIMING AT THE CENTRE OF THE FORMATION, HE PULLS THE TRIGGER!...



A MIRACLE HAPPENS! CATAPULTED FORWARD, THE BOMB EXPLODES AMID THE ASSAULT FORCE, WIPING IT OUT IN A THUNDEROUS DETONATION!!...



AND WHILE THE FEW SURVIVING ROBOTS TURN TAIL AND FLEE, MORTIMER AND FOCAS, FOLLOWING THE LAST SUBJECTS, DIVE INTO THE POWER PLANT. JUST IN TIME FOR AN OUT-OF-BREATH RADIO OPERATOR, WHOM MORTIMER HAD BEEN CAREFUL TO LEAVE ON DUTY AT THE CP, TO ARRIVE...



The other planets' expeditionary forces are coming - I warned them about Krishma's betrayal!... We must hold for an hour! Just an hour and victory will be ours!!!



E. P. JACOBS

A PRODIGIOUS CLAMOUR GREETs THE MESSENGER'S WORDS!...

Hurrah!

Hurrah!

Hail the Liberator!

Victory!

Death to the oppressor!

Freedom!!!

BUT MORTIMER, WHO'S JUST HAD A LOOK OUTSIDE, CRIES OUT:

Focas!... Look!! What devilry is this?!

THROUGH THE SMOKE, A ROUND, SMOOTH, RADIANT MASS SPECKLED WITH INCANDESCENT LIGHTS SLITHERS PONDEROUSLY TOWARDS COSMOS!!!!

THE SIGHT MAKES FOCAS FLINCH!...

Oh no! The Thing!!! Their secret weapon – it's invulnerable, kills everything it touches, disintegrates any obstacle and possesses a diabolical 'memory!' We must retreat! Immediately!!!

Everyone, head back to the depths of the city and barricade yourselves in! Your life depends on it!!... You, operator, send the signal for the global uprising!! Go! Run!!!

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE INDEED! ALREADY THE THING IS COMING UP THE PLANT'S FRONT RAMP!!

FOCAS AND MORTIMER, WHO HAVE REMAINED BEHIND, INSTANTLY SEE THE MASSIVE DOORS MELT LIKE CHOCOLATE BEFORE THE MONSTER'S ONSLAUGHT!!!

SPLOSH

OPTING FOR DESPERATE MEASURES, MORTIMER THROWS HIS LAST BOMB AT IT. BUT TO HIS ASTONISHMENT, THE DEVICE IS ABSORBED BY THE FIERY MASS – WHICH SUDDENLY SWELLS IN VOLUME!

THE TWO MEN BARELY HAVE TIME TO LEAP THROUGH THE UNDERGROUND'S ENTRANCE...

The devil!?!

There's nothing we can do!! We must flee!!!

...AND SLAM THE ENORMOUS REINFORCED DOOR THAT SEALS IT...

CLACK

PUNY OBSTACLE! A FEW SECONDS LATER, THAT DOOR TOO COLLAPSES, LIQUEFIED!...



THUS BEGINS A DAUNTING PURSUIT WHERE FOCAS AND MORTIMER ATTEMPT FEINT AFTER FEINT, DETOUR AFTER DETOUR, BUT ALL IN VAIN: THE THING WILL NOT BE DECEIVED!...



Strange — it's as if it can 'sniff out' our trail!

Ah! I understand, Mortimer — we must split up!

What!?!

Yes. They must have got the Thing to 'sniff out' my scent during my hypnotic sleep, and its infallible memory won't let me escape!... That's why we must separate immediately!... I'll head back to Cosmos. You run towards the city and take command... It's our only chance of saving our cause!...

That's terrible!... But you're right... Count on me!



AND AT THE NEXT CROSSROADS...

Good luck, Mortimer!

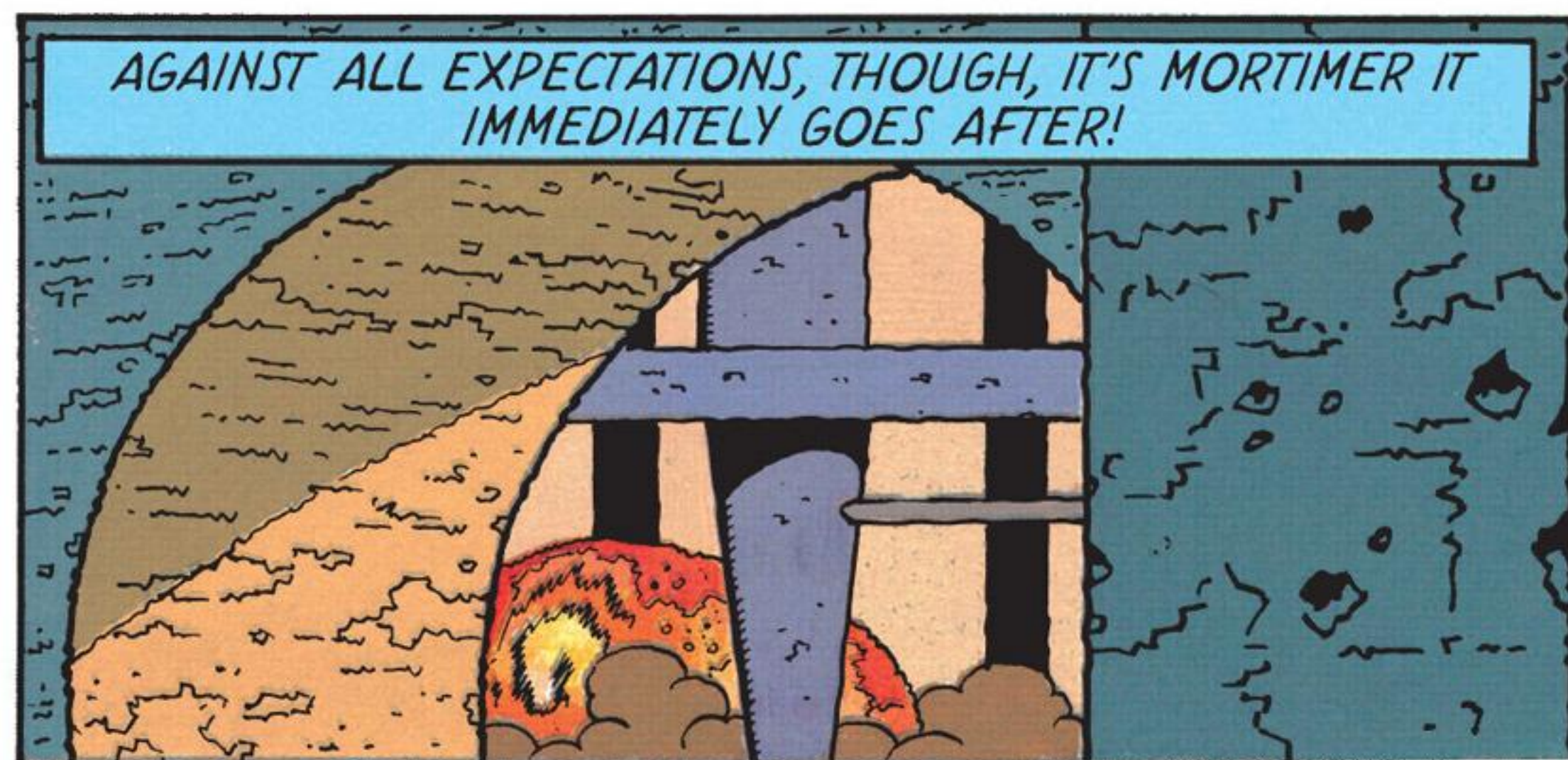
Good luck, Focas!



AS THE MEN ESCAPE THEIR SEPARATE WAYS, THE HORRIBLE THING ALREADY COMES INTO SIGHT...



AGAINST ALL EXPECTATIONS, THOUGH, IT'S MORTIMER IT IMMEDIATELY GOES AFTER!



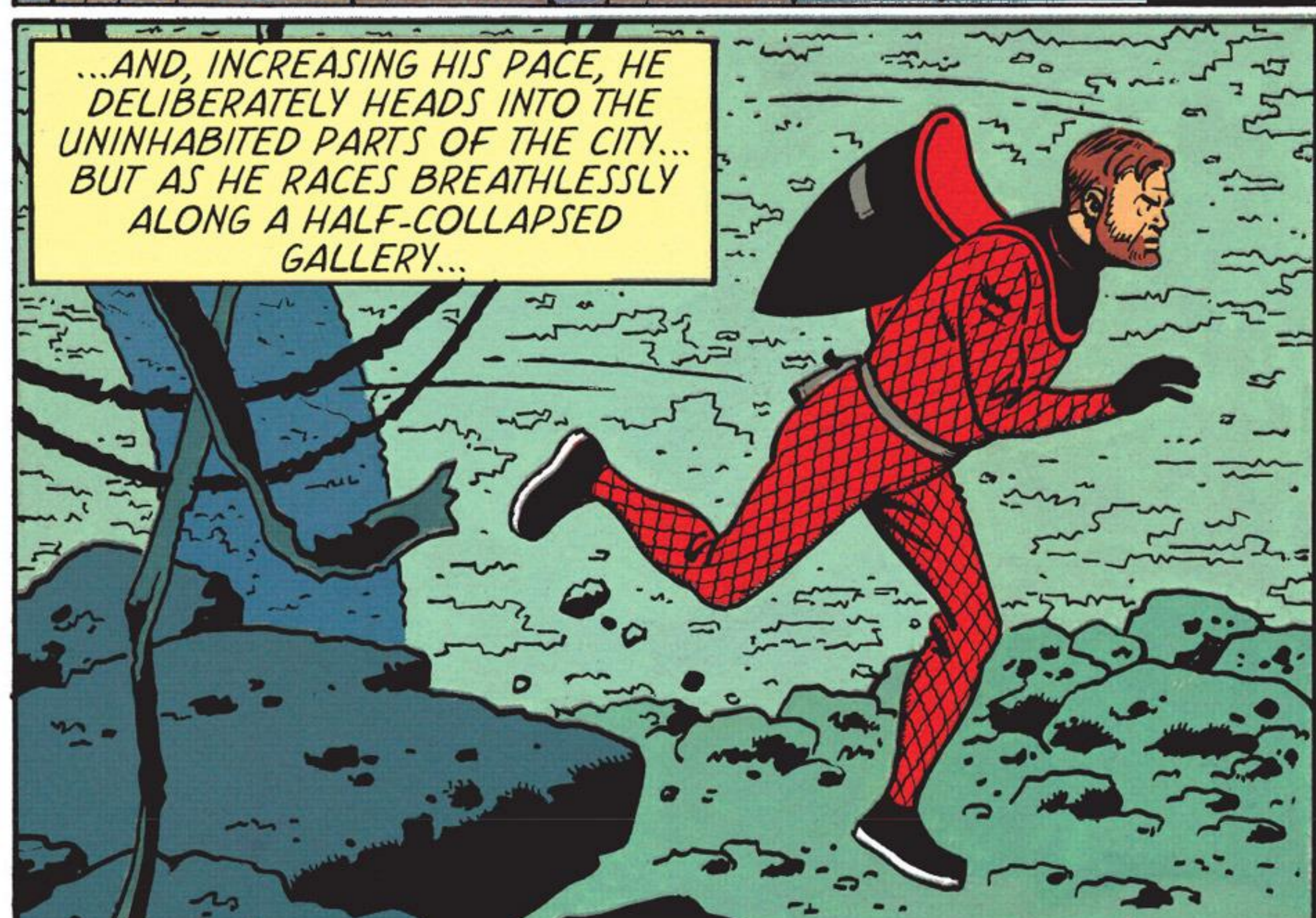
Goodness! So it's actually after me... Ah! I have to lead it away from the city!!



CATCHING A SOLID HOLD OF A CABLE, HE STEPS OFF AND LETS HIMSELF DROP DOWN IT LIKE A STONE...



...AND, INCREASING HIS PACE, HE DELIBERATELY HEADS INTO THE UNINHABITED PARTS OF THE CITY... BUT AS HE RACES BREATHLESSLY ALONG A HALF-COLLAPSED GALLERY...



...HE NARROWLY AVOIDS FALLING DOWN A DEEP HOLE!...

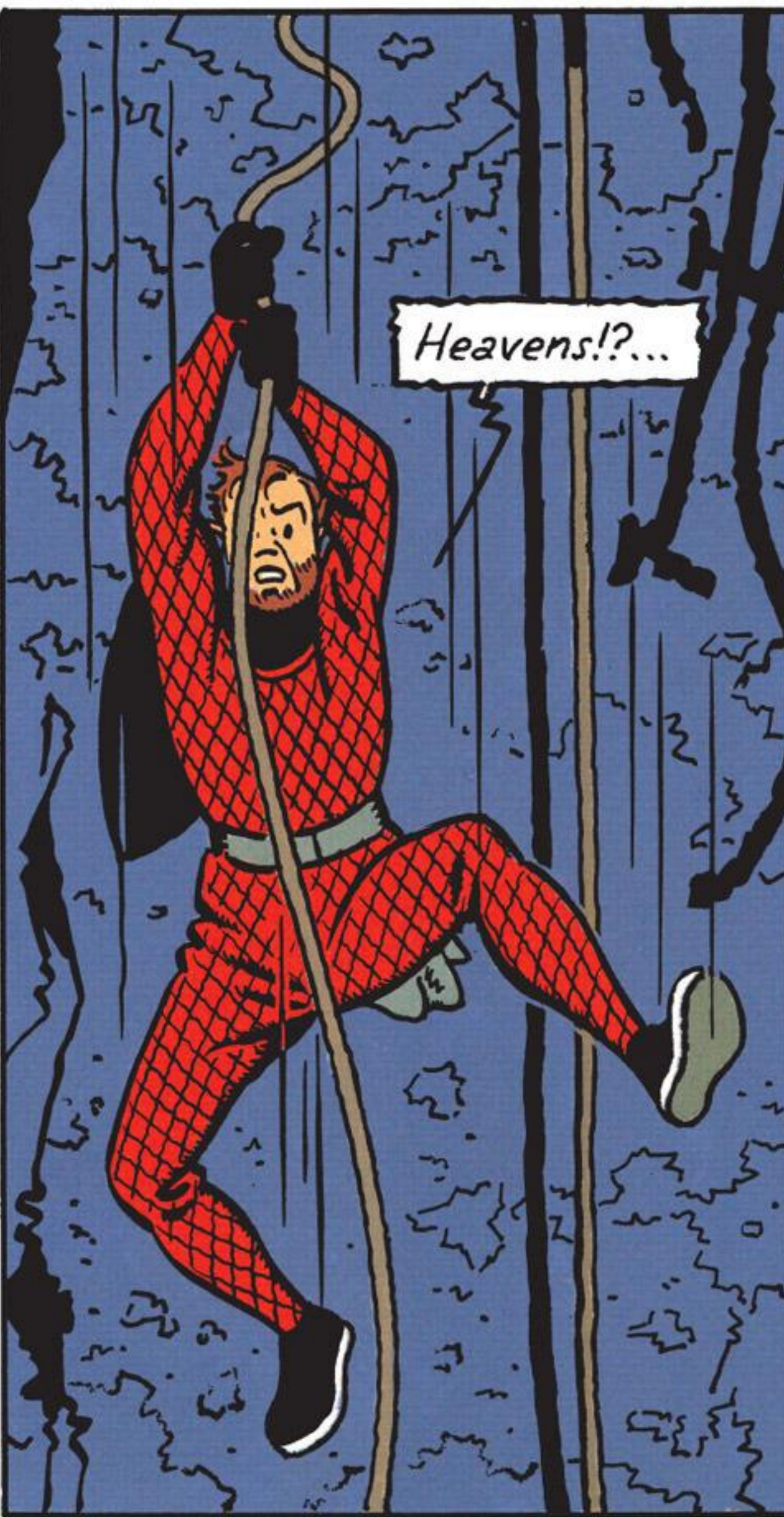
By Jove! That's our lift shaft!!



JUST IN TIME, FOR ALREADY MORTIMER'S MONSTROUS PURSUER IS THERE, POURING THROUGH THE OPENING...



THE PROFESSOR IS BARELY SIX FEET OFF THE GROUND WHEN THE MELTED CABLE SUDDENLY GIVES WAY...



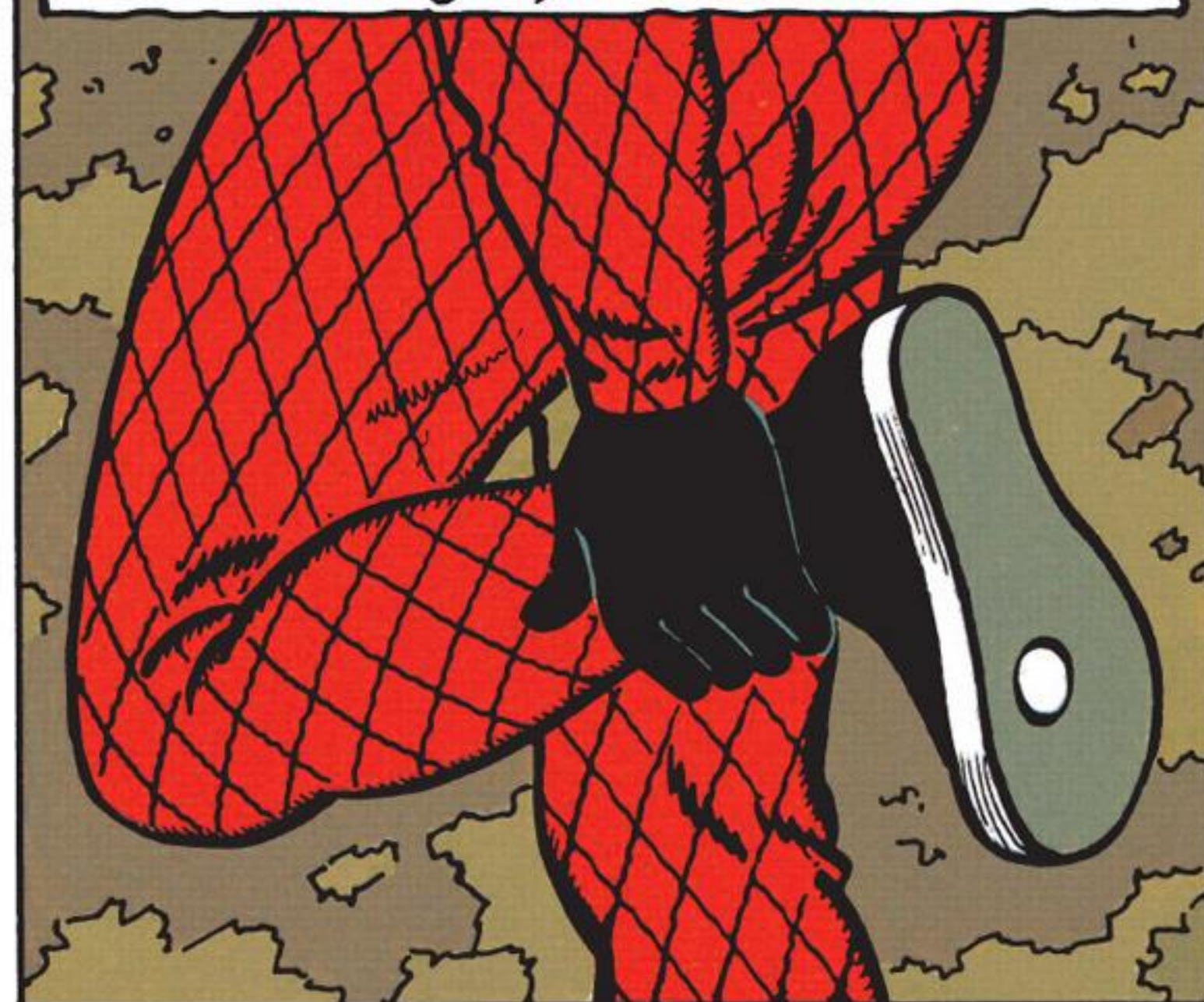
THE SHOCK IS SO BRUTAL THAT IN THE FALL HIS HELMET FLOPS FORWARD OVER HIS HEAD...



...BUT OVERCOMING HIS PAIN, HE LEAPS TO HIS FEET AGAIN AND, UNDER A RAIN OF BURNING DEBRIS, LUNGES OUT OF THE SHAFT!...



Nothing's broken... I was lucky! But what's this?!... Good grief!!!



MORTIMER HAS JUST NOTICED ONE OF KRISHMA'S BEACONS, STUCK TO THE UNDERSIDE OF HIS SHOE!

I get it now! Krishna must have stepped on it when he fled and the beacon, protected by the suit, survived the robots' fire!... That's why the Thing won't leave me alone!



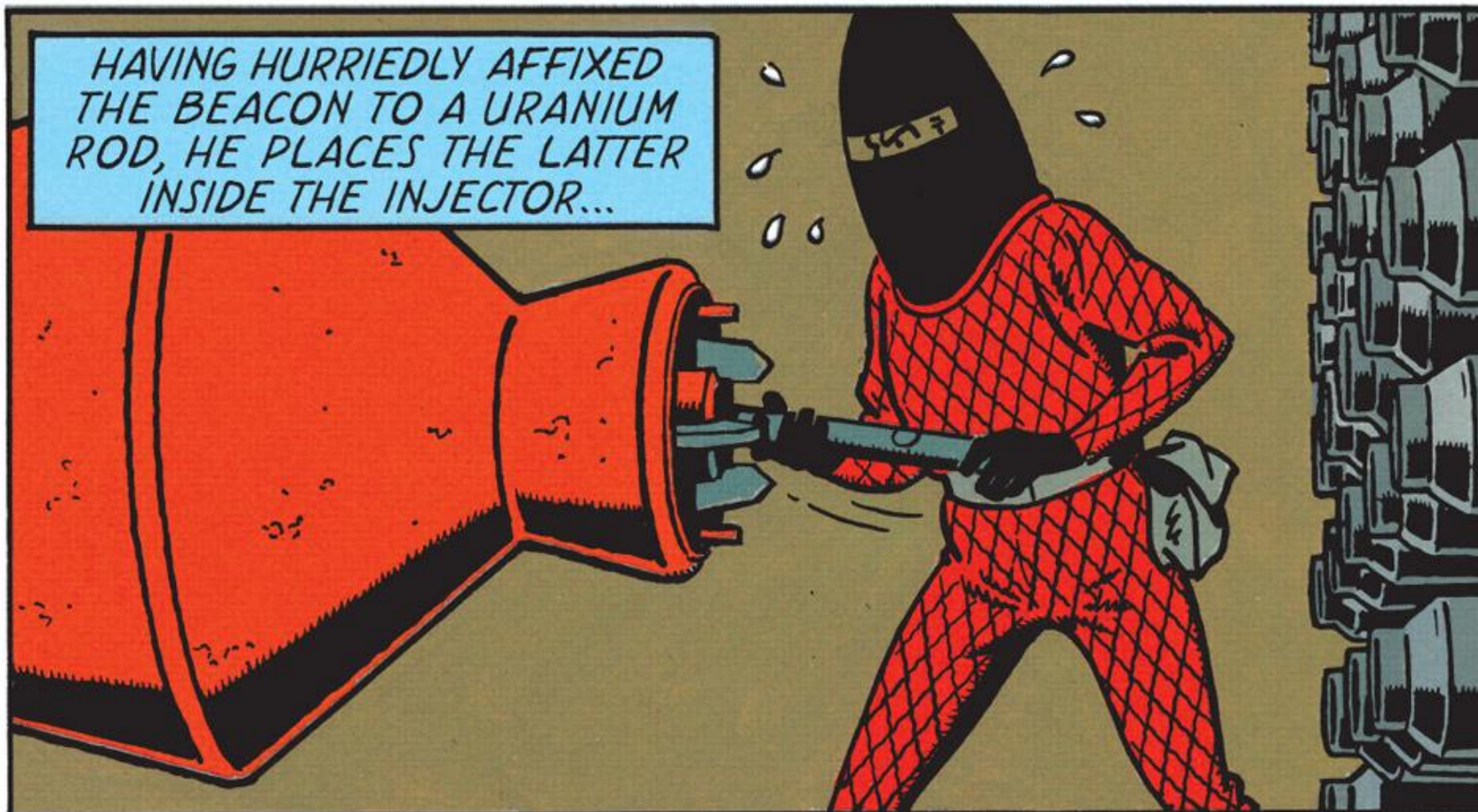
Now I've got to get rid of this blasted beacon as quickly as possible!



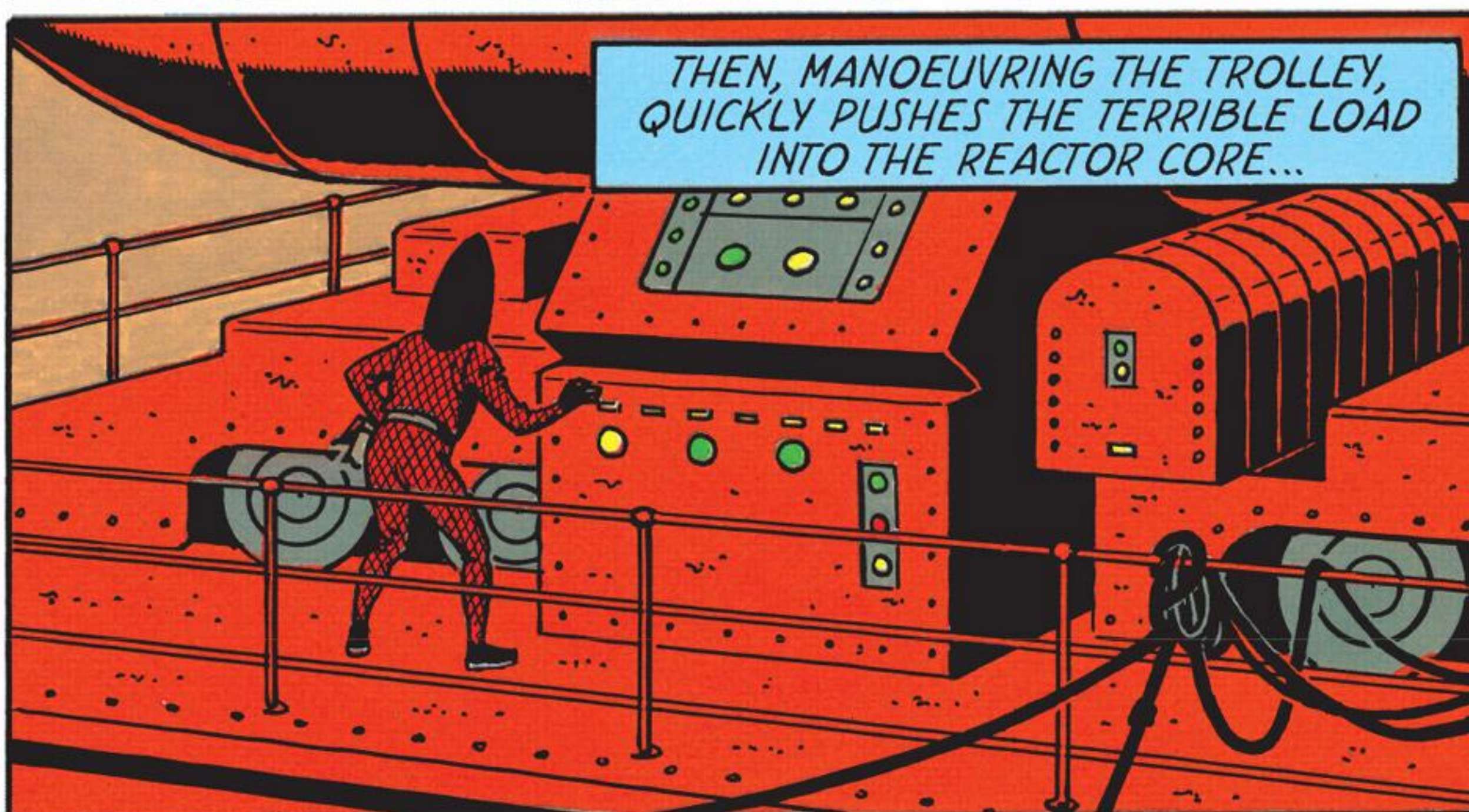
AND MORTIMER DASHES TOWARDS THE MOVEABLE BRIDGE, CLIMBING FRANTICALLY...



HAVING HURRIEDLY AFFIXED THE BEACON TO A URANIUM ROD, HE PLACES THE LATTER INSIDE THE INJECTOR...

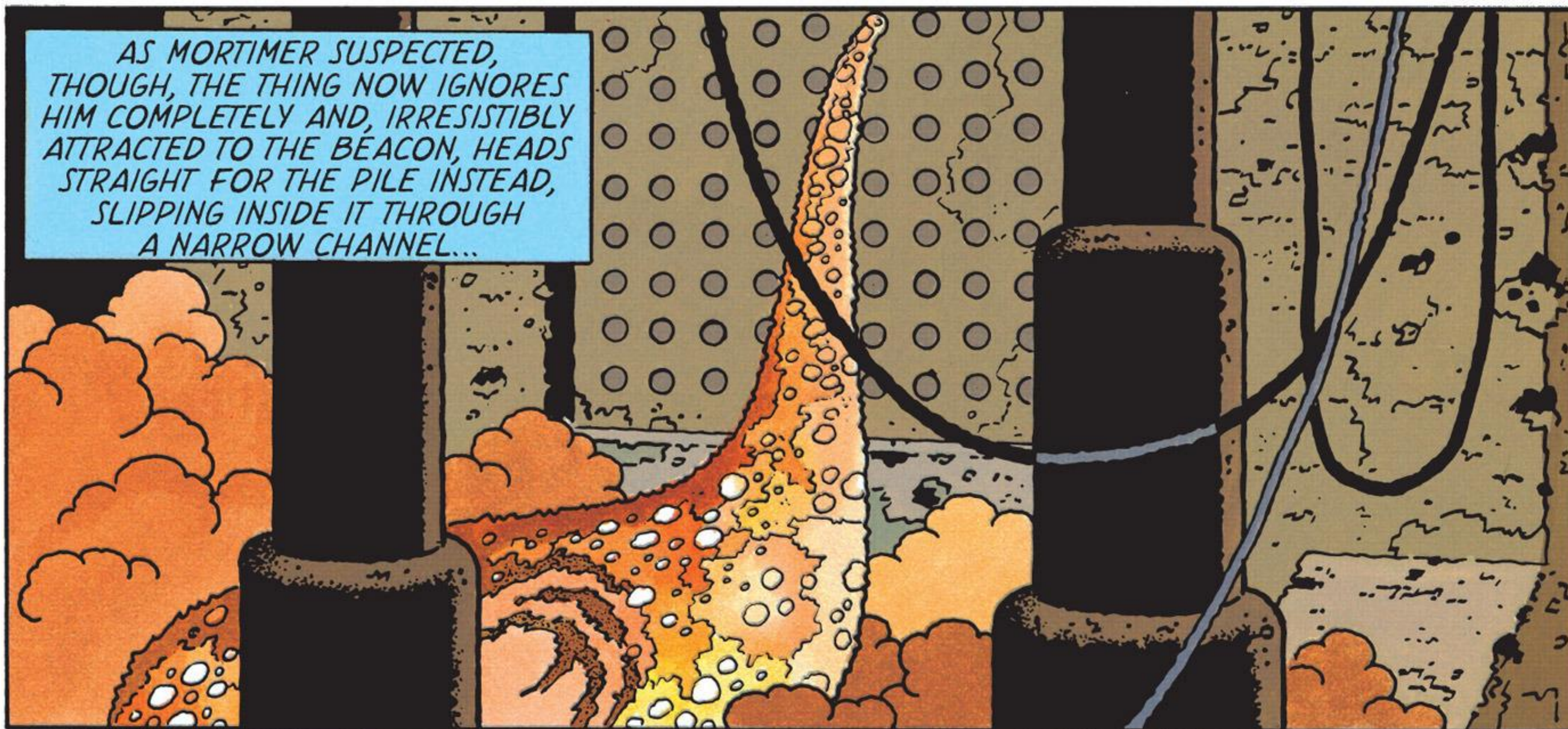


THEN, MANOEUVRING THE TROLLEY, QUICKLY PUSHES THE TERRIBLE LOAD INTO THE REACTOR CORE...



THAT DONE, HE BEATS A HASTY RETREAT TOWARDS THE CONTROL ROOM, FOR THE THING, EMERGING FROM THE SHAFT, HAS JUST ENTERED THE HALL!!





AS MORTIMER SUSPECTED, THOUGH, THE THING NOW IGNORES HIM COMPLETELY AND, IRRESISTIBLY ATTRACTED TO THE BEACON, HEADS STRAIGHT FOR THE PILE INSTEAD, SLIPPING INSIDE IT THROUGH A NARROW CHANNEL...

INSTANTLY, A DREADFUL RUMBLING RISES FROM INSIDE IT...



...AND AS THE WHOLE ENORMOUS MASS BEGINS VIBRATING FURIOUSLY, MORTIMER BOLTS TOWARDS THE CRYPT...



THE PROFESSOR, WHO'D BEEN WAITING FOR THAT MOMENT, UNLEASHES THE FULL POWER OF THE REACTOR AT ONCE!



There's no way I can head back up now... I must get back to the Chronoscaphe at all costs...



ALL OF A SUDDEN, HE CATCHES SIGHT OF HIS PIT CALL SIGNAL...

Focas!!



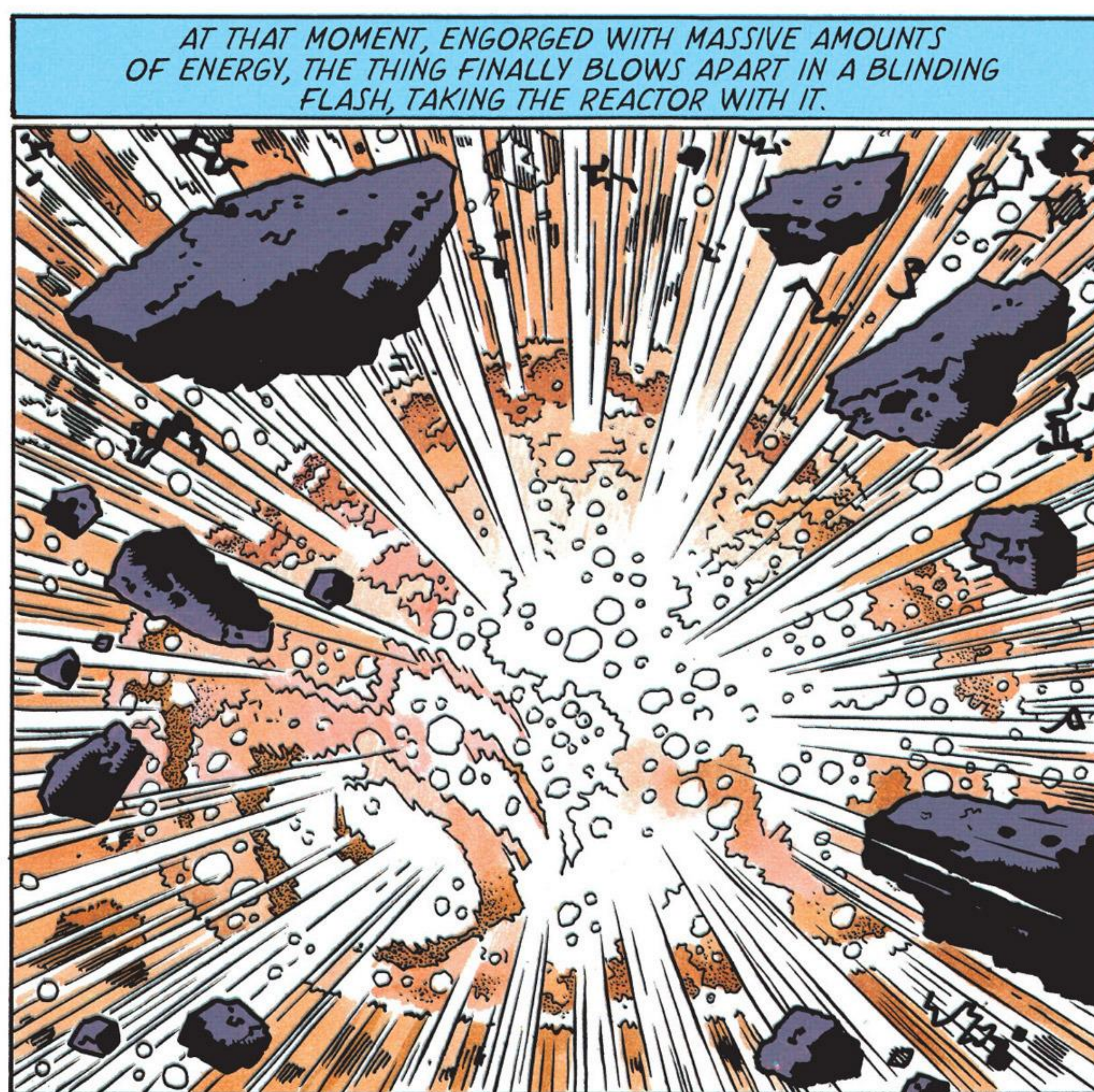
Mortimer!... Alive! Thank God!... Our victory is complete!... Thanks to you, our friends from space got here on time... What about you!?!...

In a short time I'll have left your time!...



Yes, I owe that chase to a beacon accidentally stuck to my shoe. Fortunately, I managed to lure the Thing into the reactor and turn it on... That should destroy that monstrosity... but I can feel the ground shake! Doubtless the pile is about to blow any second now... I must leave you... Farewell, Focas... Build a better, fairer world! Adieu!!!!

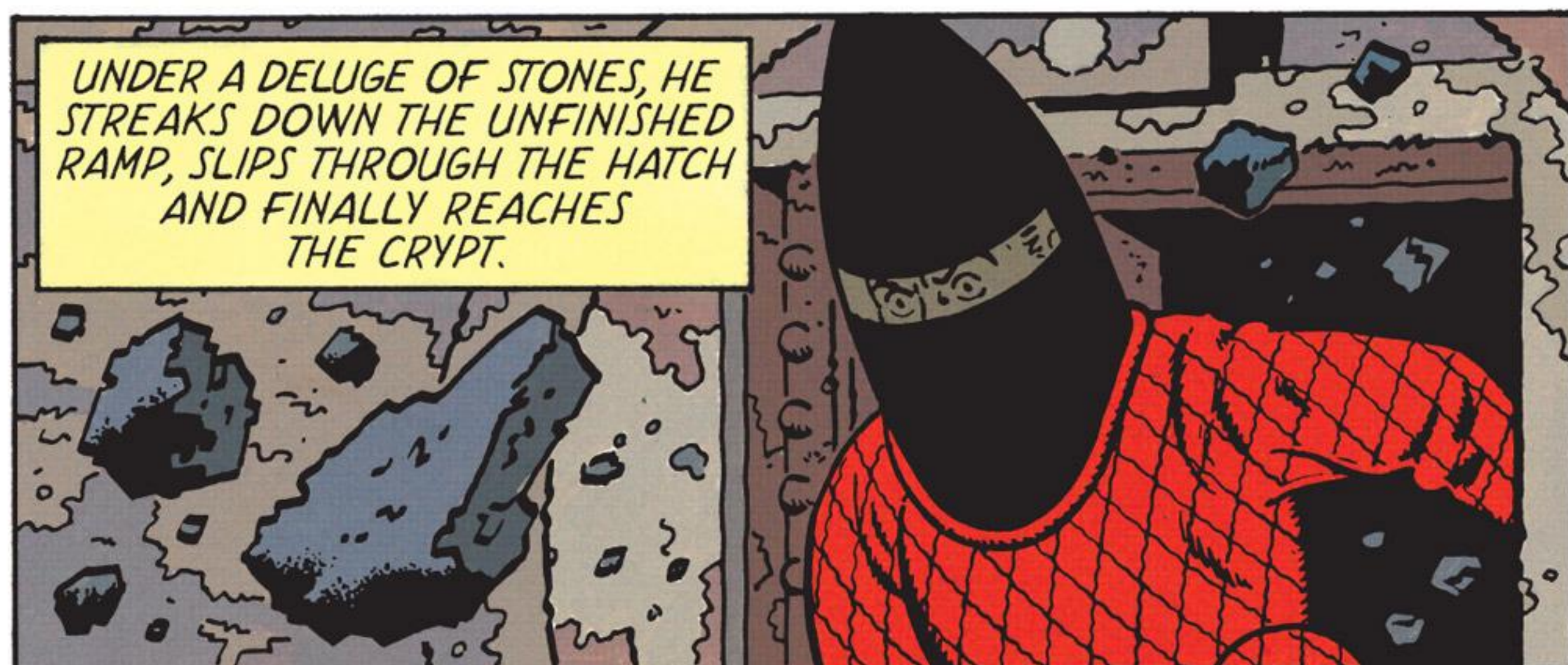
Farewell, Mortimer!



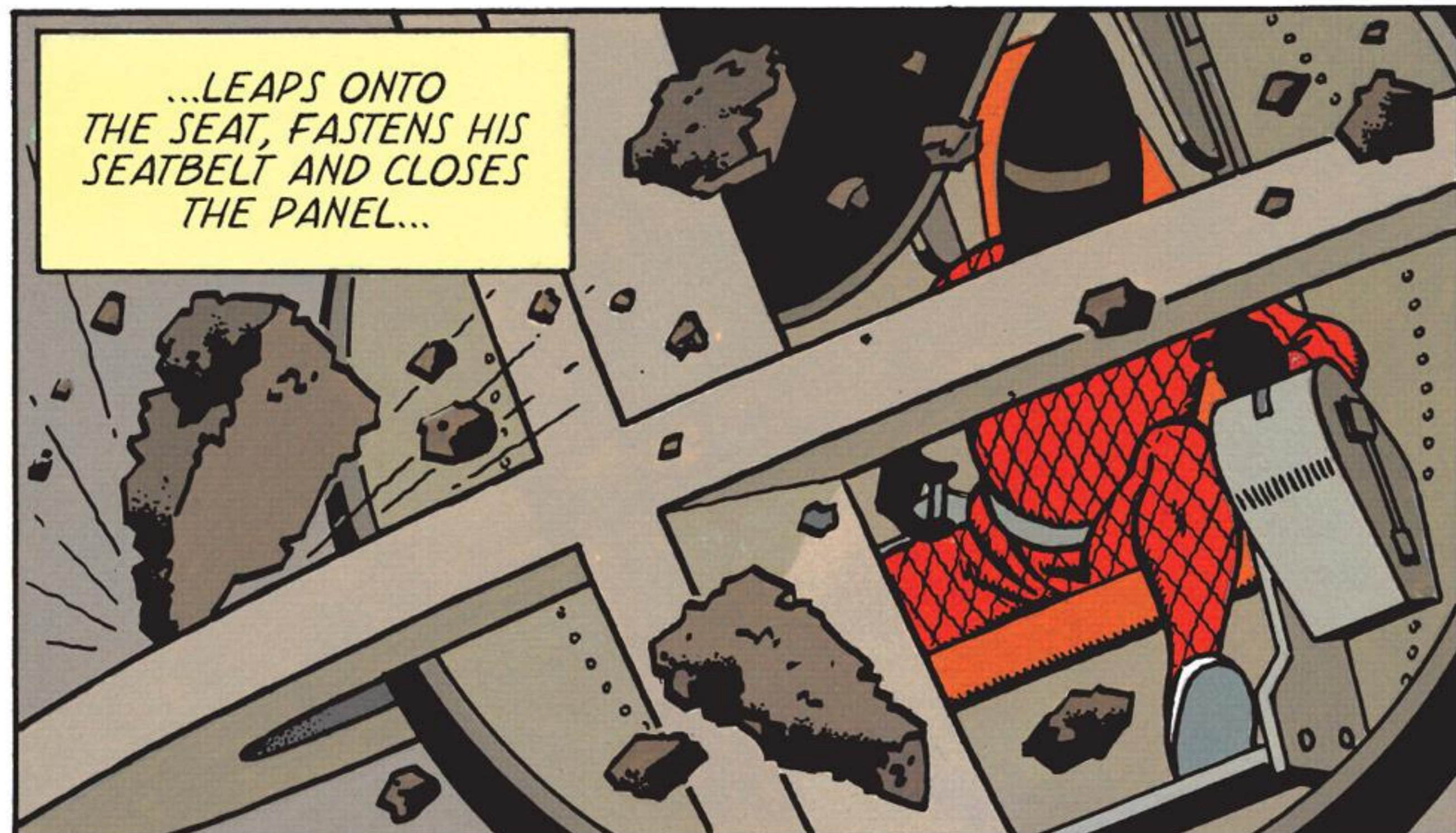
AT THAT MOMENT, ENGORGED WITH MASSIVE AMOUNTS OF ENERGY, THE THING FINALLY BLOWS APART IN A BLINDING FLASH, TAKING THE REACTOR WITH IT.



AND AS EVERYTHING COLLAPSES AROUND HIM, MORTIMER DESPERATELY SPRINTS TOWARDS THE CHRONOSCAPHE!!!



UNDER A DELUGE OF STONES, HE STREAKS DOWN THE UNFINISHED RAMP, SLIPS THROUGH THE HATCH AND FINALLY REACHES THE CRYPT.

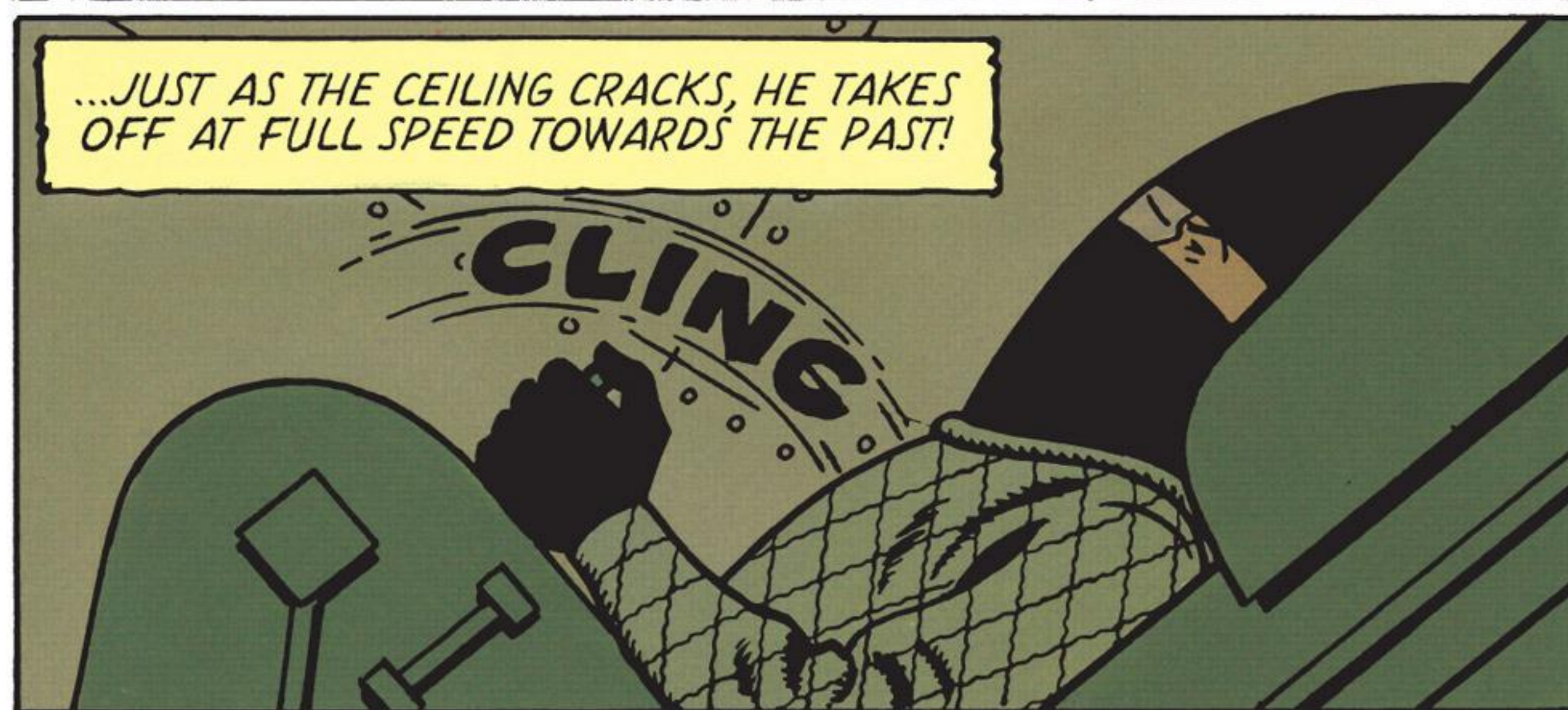


...LEAPS ONTO THE SEAT, FASTENS HIS SEATBELT AND CLOSES THE PANEL...

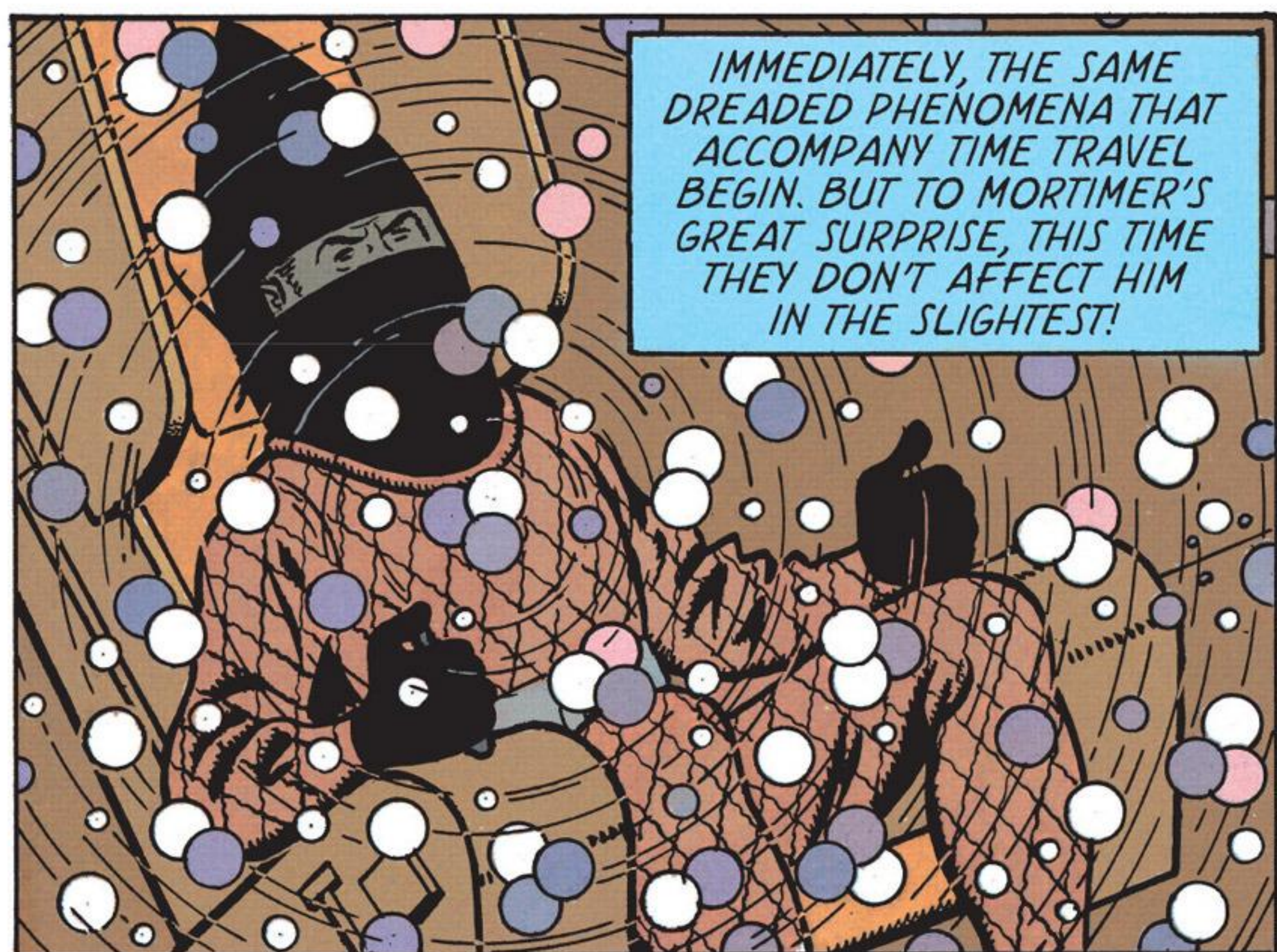


It's still there! Thank God!

THEN, WITHOUT EVEN STOPPING TO CATCH HIS BREATH, HE DASHES TO THE SMALL CRAFT...



...JUST AS THE CEILING CRACKS, HE TAKES OFF AT FULL SPEED TOWARDS THE PAST!

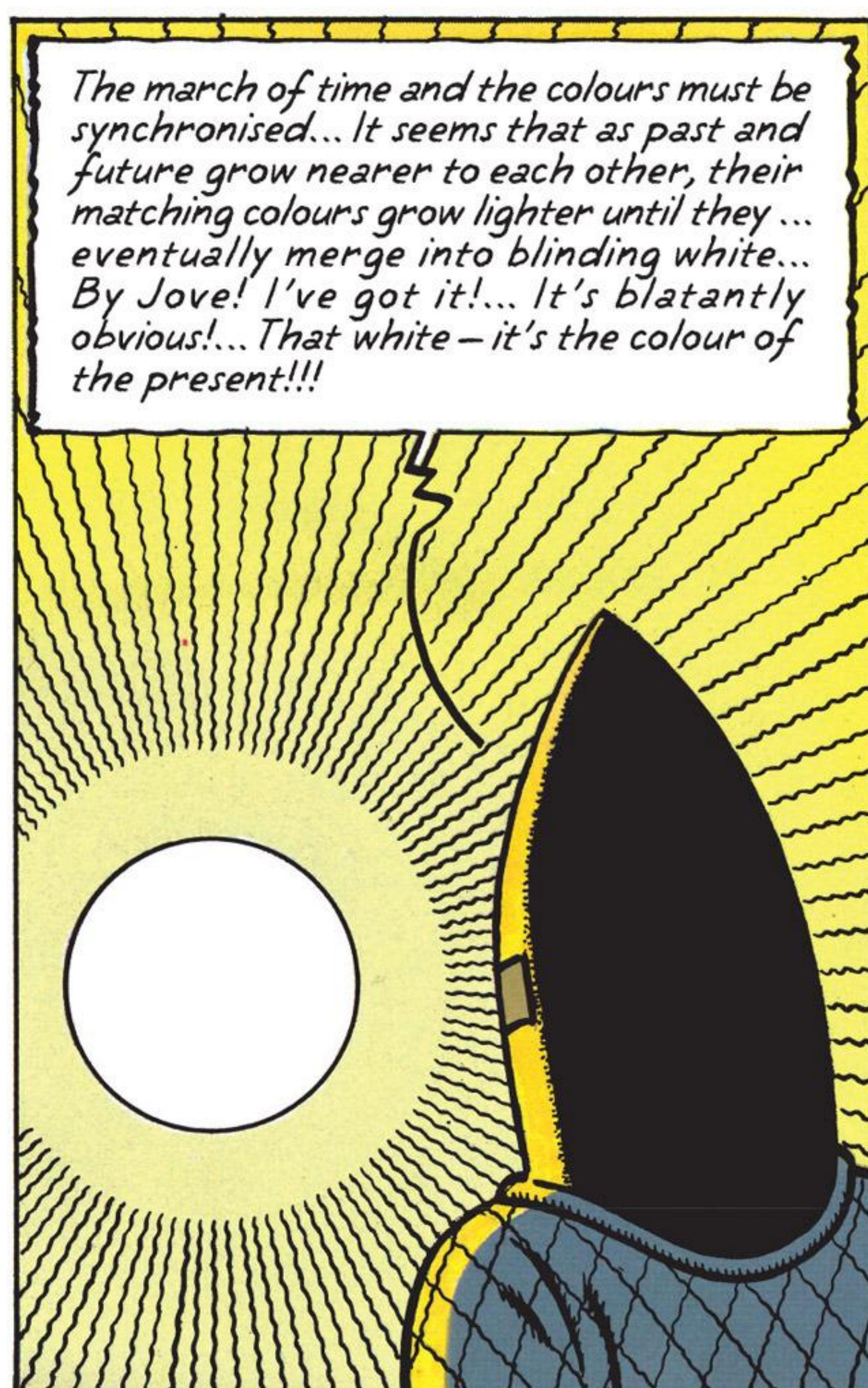
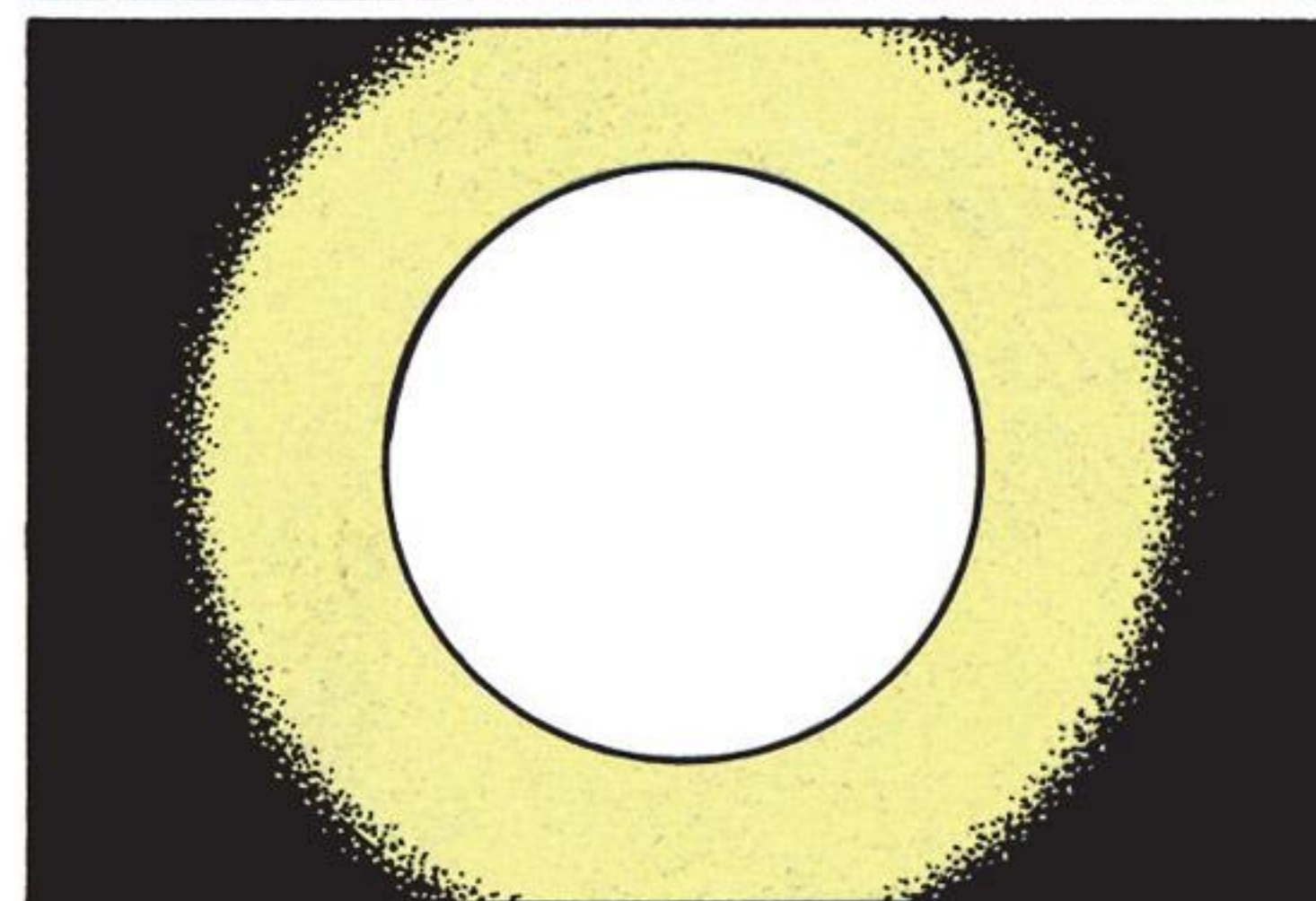


IMMEDIATELY, THE SAME DREADED PHENOMENA THAT ACCOMPANY TIME TRAVEL BEGIN. BUT TO MORTIMER'S GREAT SURPRISE, THIS TIME THEY DON'T AFFECT HIM IN THE SLIGHTEST!



How strange! No vertigo, no faintness!... Oh, I understand: it's this suit that's protecting me!... Well, well - now that's interesting!

WITH THIS NEW PARADIGM, THE PROFESSOR CAN FOR THE FIRST TIME APPLY ALL HIS ASTUTENESS. AND HE NOTICES THAT THE SPECTROGRAPH'S LIGHT, ORIGINALLY GREEN, GRADUALLY TURNS FROM RED TO ORANGE, THEN FROM ORANGE TO YELLOW...



The march of time and the colours must be synchronised... It seems that as past and future grow nearer to each other, their matching colours grow lighter until they... eventually merge into blinding white... By Jove! I've got it!... It's blatantly obvious!... That white - it's the colour of the present!!!

JUST THEN, AS THE SPECTROGRAPH SHINES A DAZZLING WHITE, HE SUDDENLY SEES HIMSELF ENTERING THE CHRONOSCAPHE, AS BEFORE...



Good grief!! Here's that ghost again!

THEN A LONG, SHRILL WHISTLING FILLS THE COCKPIT...



AND AS MILOSH'S TRIUMPHANT CALLS FOLLOW, HIS FACE, CONTORTED IN GLEE, APPEARS BEFORE THE WIDE-EYED MORTIMER...



BON VOYAGE MORTIMER
BON VOYAGE HA! HA! HA!

INSTINCTIVELY, MORTIMER HAS PULLED THE STOP LEVER, AND THE MACHINE COMES TO AN INCREDIBLY BRUTAL REST...



BUT, PROTECTED BY HIS SUIT, HE HASN'T FELT THE USUAL SHOCK. IN SECONDS HE JUMPS OUT...



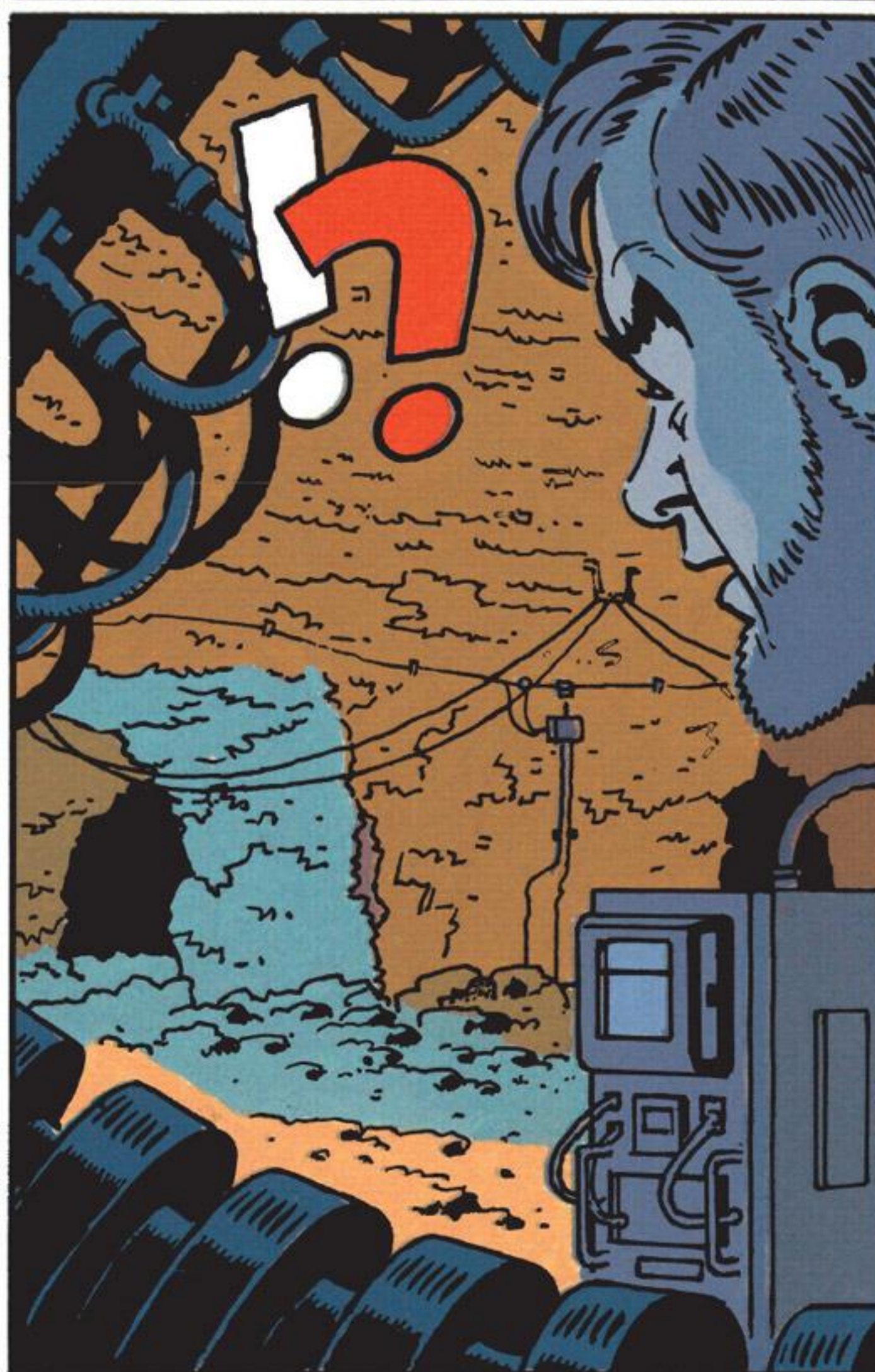
...AND RUNS HAPPILY TO THE MAIN CRYPT...



INDEED, THE PLACE IS SHOWING NO SIGNS OF THE WANTON DESTRUCTION THAT HAD SO INTRIGUED HIM!



ALL OF A SUDDEN, HIS EYES ARE DRAWN TO A DISTANT CORNER, WHERE BRIGHT LIGHTS ARE SHINING...



ABOUT TO HEAD IN THAT DIRECTION, MORTIMER HASTILY JUMPS BACK - FOR ANOTHER SILHOUETTE HAS JUST COME INTO VIEW...



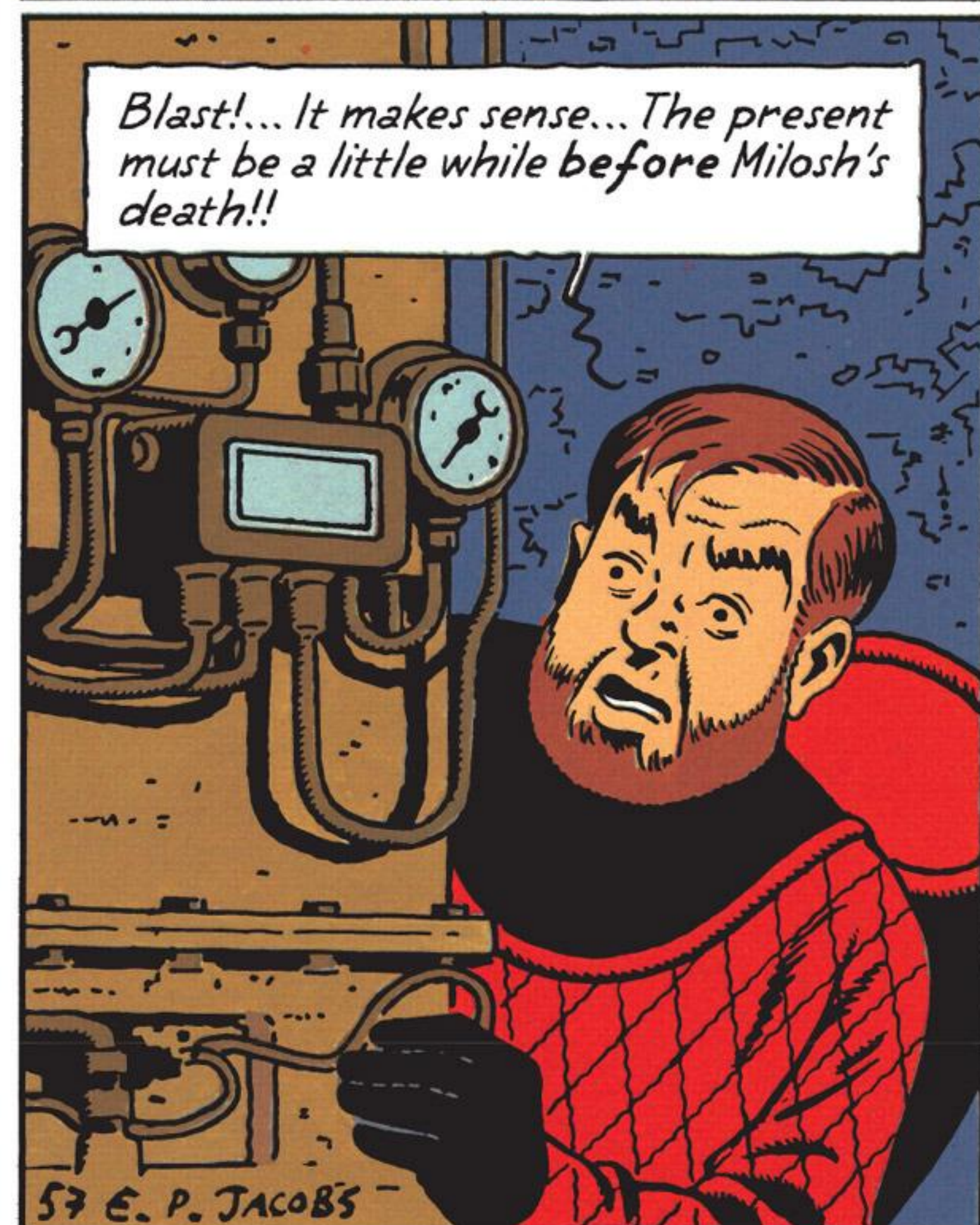
HIDING IN THE SHADOWS, HE WATCHES THE PERSON APPROACH RAPIDLY, HOLDING A GLEAMING PIECE OF MACHINERY...



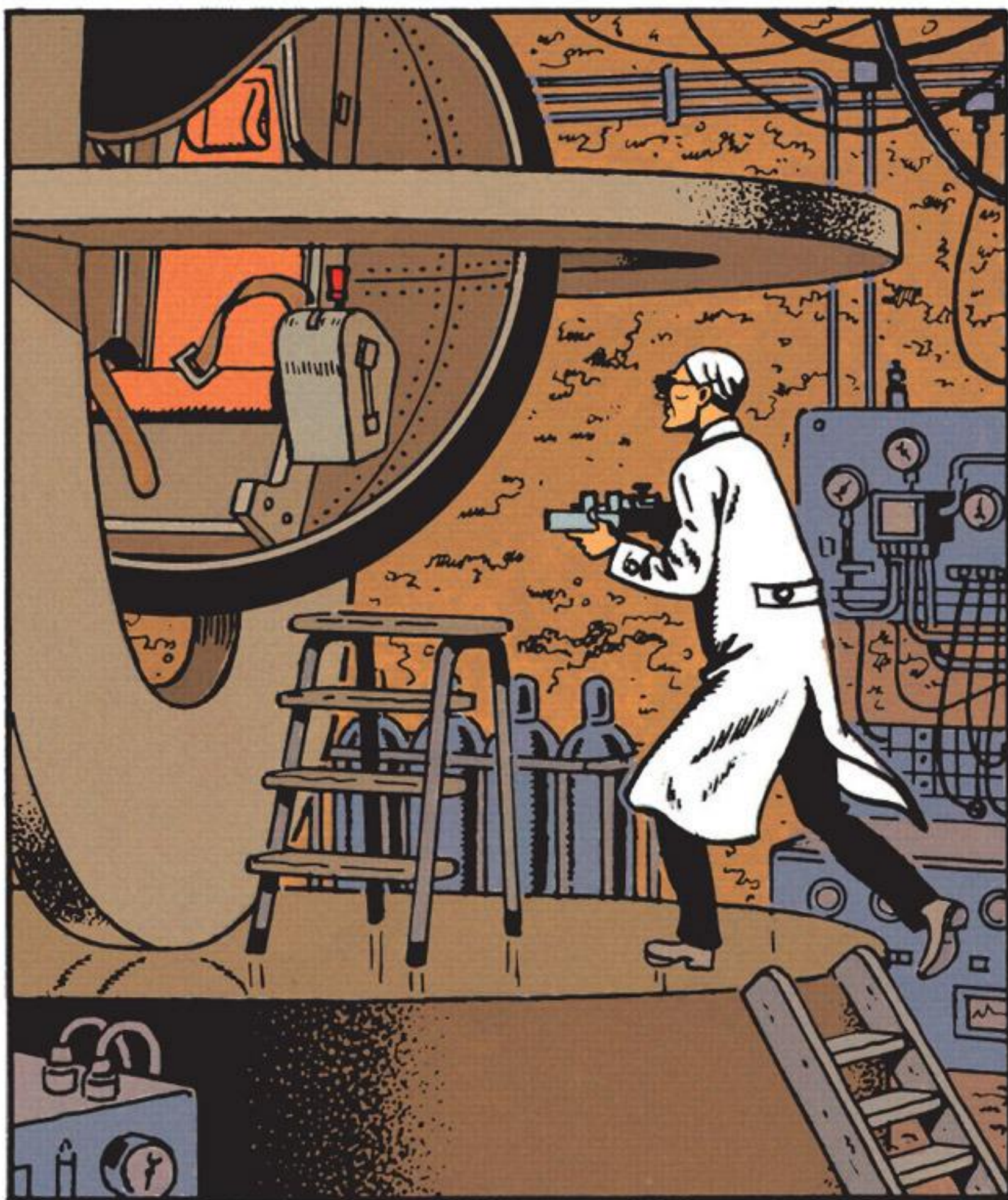
AT LAST MORTIMER RECOGNISES HIM... THE MAN RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS TERRIFYING ADVENTURES... PROFESSOR MILOSH!! BUT AN AGED MILOSH, RAVAGED BY RADIATIONS...



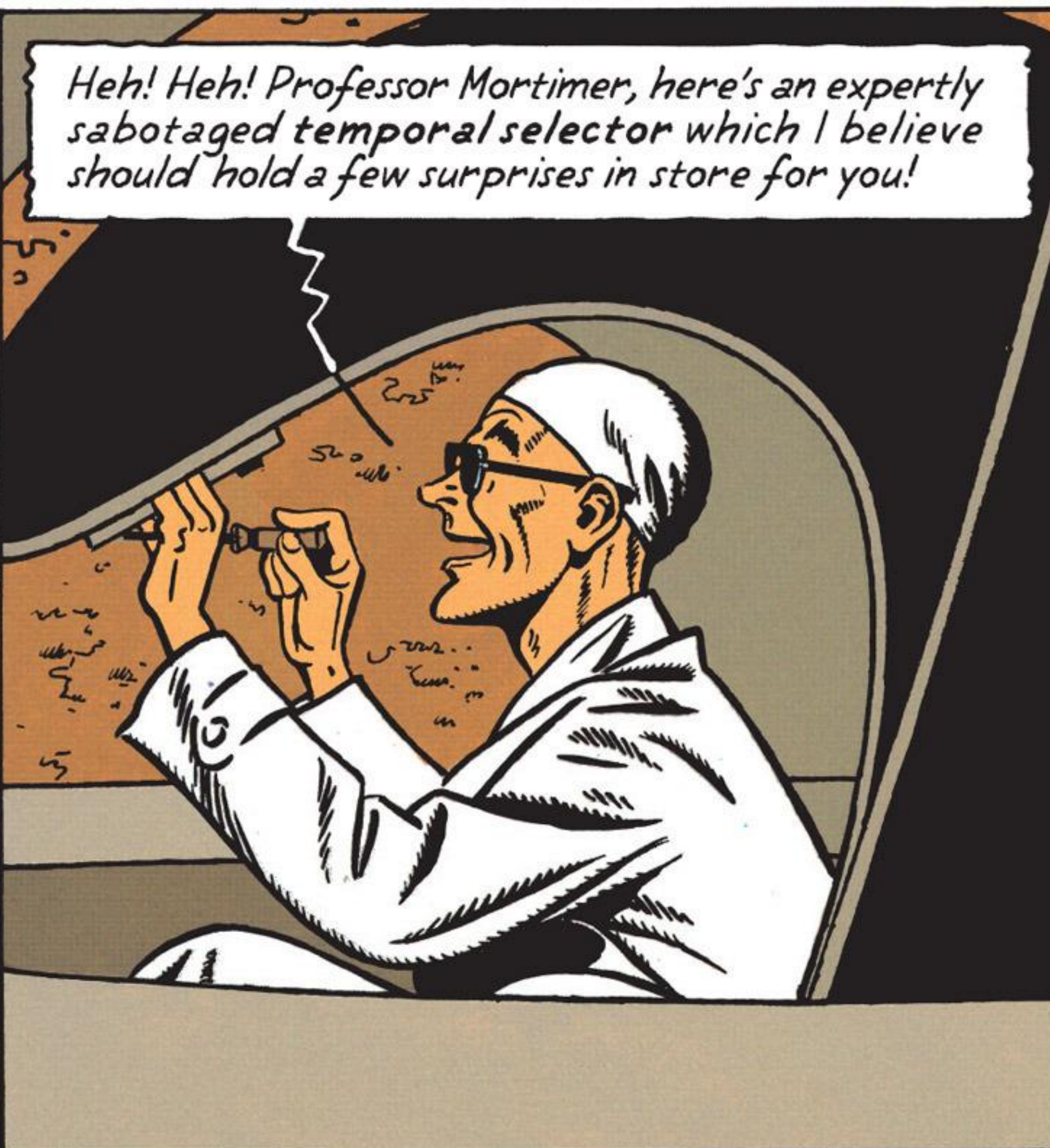
MOMENTARILY STUNNED BY THE EXTRAORDINARY APPARITION, HE QUICKLY GATHERS HIS WITS...



MEANWHILE, MILOSH HAS WALKED PAST THE PROFESSOR WITHOUT SEEING HIM. HEADING STRAIGHT FOR THE CHRONOSCAPHE, HE NIMBLY CLIMBS ABOARD...



...AND, TALKING TO HIMSELF ALL THE WHILE, HE PUTS THE PART HE'S JUST COMPLETED INTO PLACE...



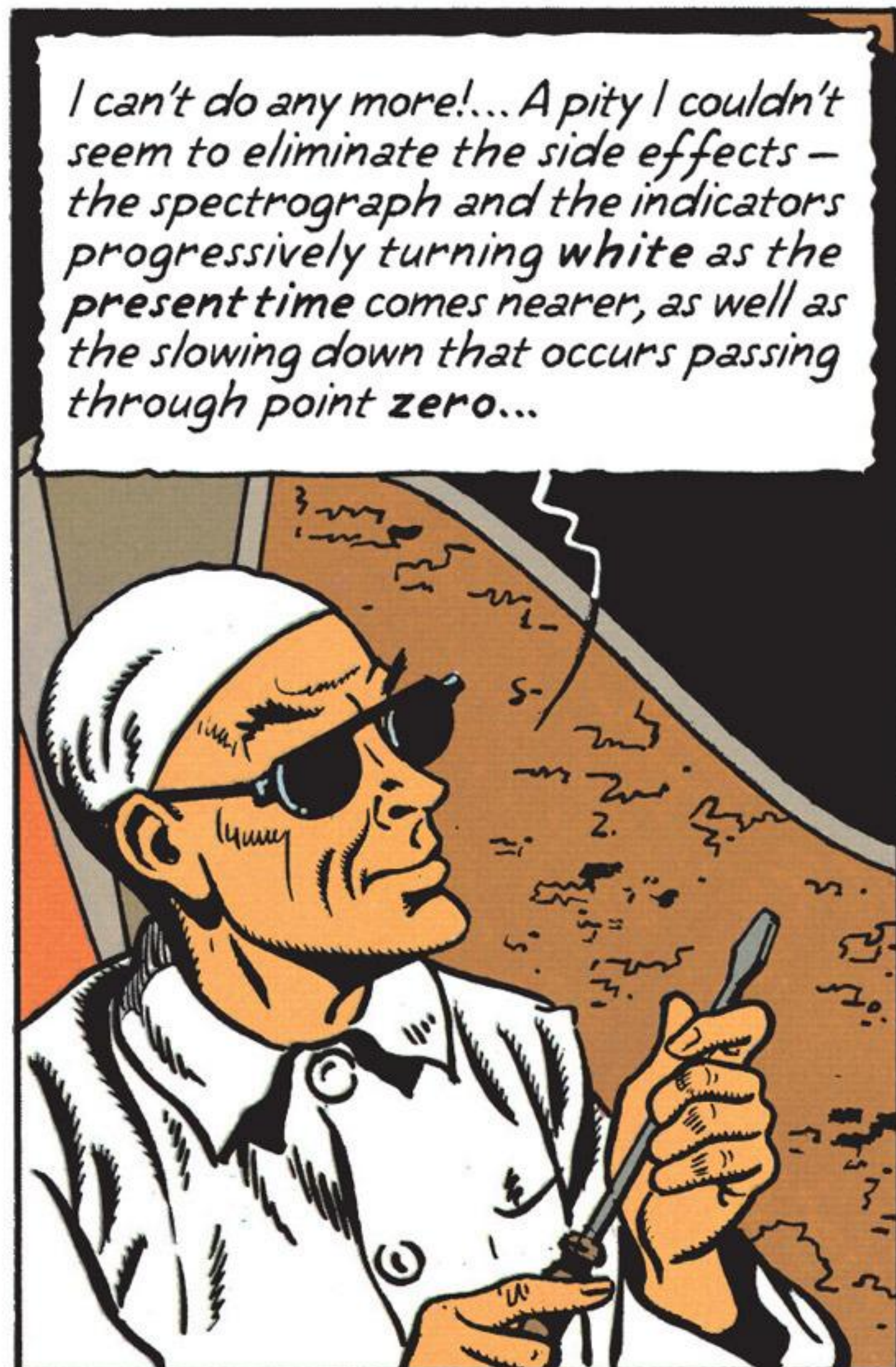
Heh! Heh! Professor Mortimer, here's an expertly sabotaged temporal selector which I believe should hold a few surprises in store for you!

OUR FRIEND, SIDLING CLOSER, DOESN'T MISS A WORD OF THE STRANGE CHATTER...



And now I set this lever so that starting will be too sudden to allow for any observation...

VISIBLY SATISFIED, MILOSH GAZES UPON HIS WORK...



I can't do any more!... A pity I couldn't seem to eliminate the side effects – the spectrograph and the indicators progressively turning white as the present time comes nearer, as well as the slowing down that occurs passing through point zero...

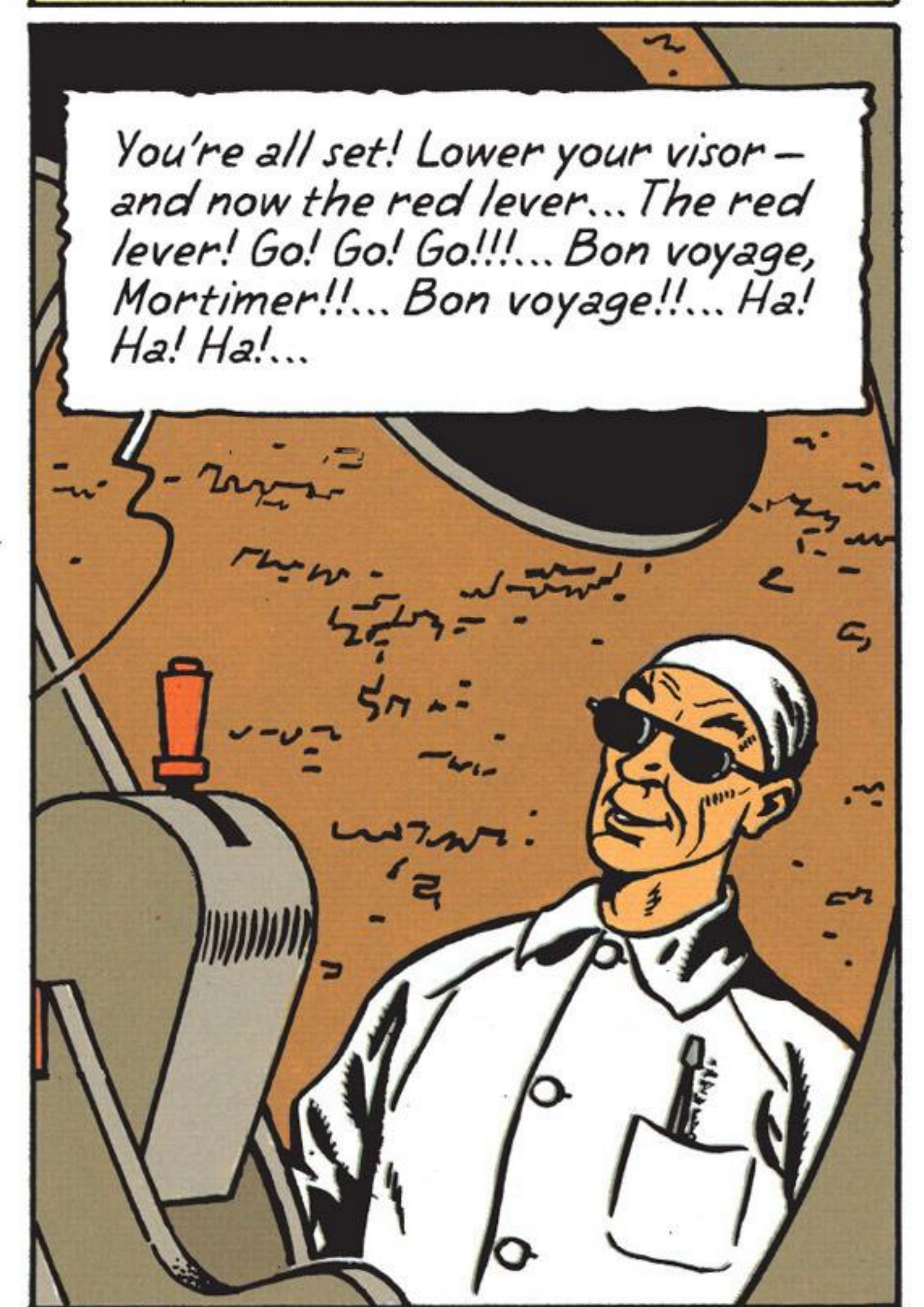


...But, bah! You'll be so overwhelmed by the sensations of departure, my dear old friend, that you'll be in no shape to notice such subtle details!... Anyway, I've prepared for every possibility!!



...And now let's listen to our little recording!...

MILOSH PLAYS BACK THE MAGNETIC TAPE THAT MORTIMER KNOWS ONLY TOO WELL!...



You're all set! Lower your visor – and now the red lever... The red lever! Go! Go! Go!!!... Bon voyage, Mortimer!!... Bon voyage!!... Ha! Ha! Ha!...

SEIZED BY INSANE JOY, MILOSH ADDS HIS OWN LAUGHTER TO THAT ON THE RECORDING...



HAHAHAHA!

...THEN, HOLDING HIS SIDES, HE STUMBLES AWAY THROUGH THE LABORATORY, HEADING FOR THE SMALL STAIRCASE...



Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!!!

AT LAST THE TRAPDOOR CLOSSES AND THE LIGHTS GO OUT.



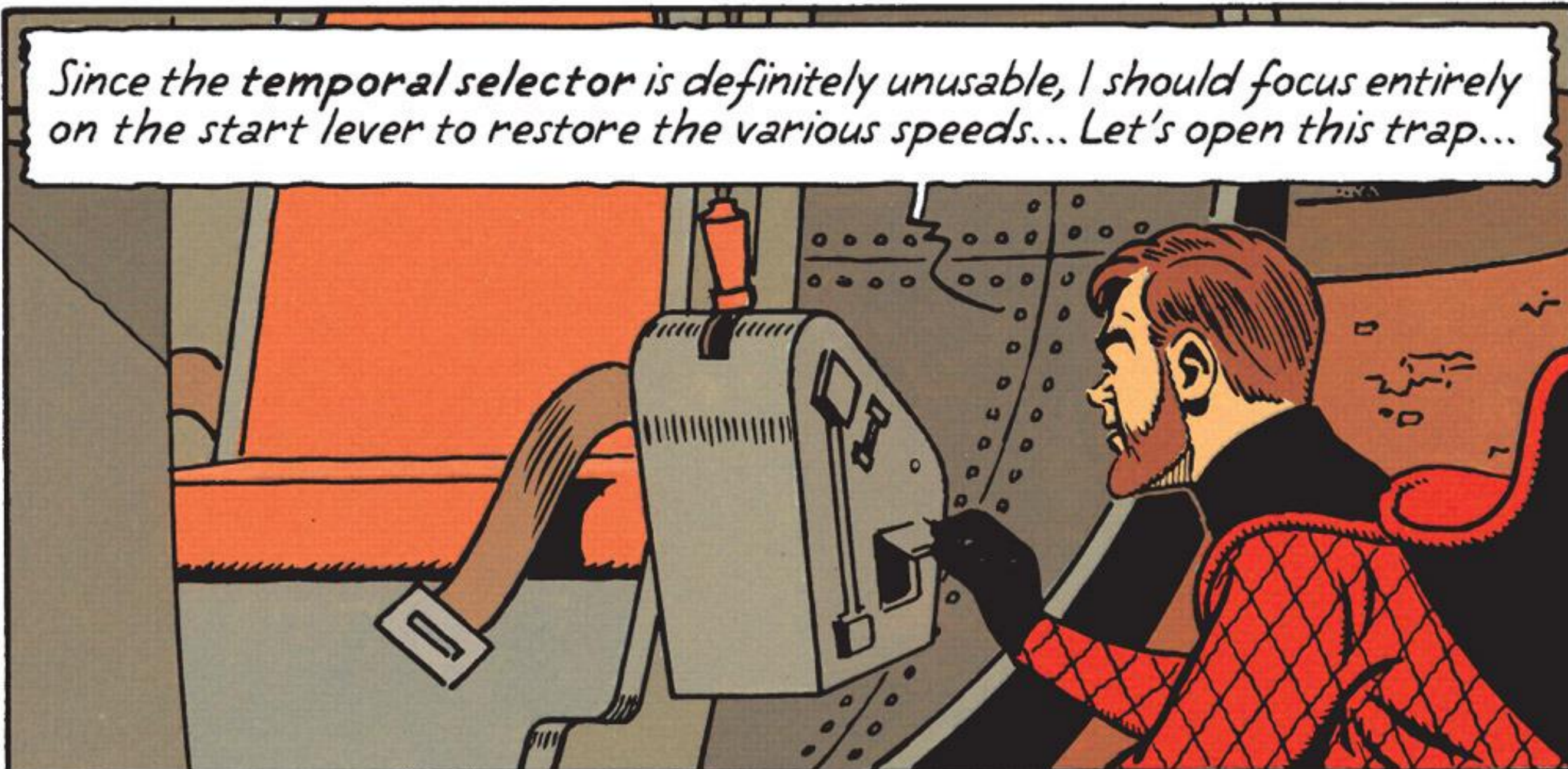
That cad!... But forget him! Now I must put what I heard to good use!!

E. P. JACOBS

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Let's see — the white light's peak intensity, the zero reading on the indicators and a pronounced slowing are indeed all signs of the 'present'... But there's a vital condition: all those clues are only perceptible when the machine is running at reduced speed... Right, to work!



Since the temporal selector is definitely unusable, I should focus entirely on the start lever to restore the various speeds... Let's open this trap...



Ah-ha! I see: the first and second speed were bypassed, leaving only the third... Child's play!



AFTER A LITTLE SKILFUL WORK, MORTIMER HAS RE-ESTABLISHED THE NORMAL ELECTRICAL CONNECTIONS...

There! Everything's in order!!



My dear Milosh, I think this time I've escaped your infernal trap for good!... Goodbye — and may the devil take you!



BACK IN HIS SEAT, THE PROFESSOR CAREFULLY EASES INTO FIRST...

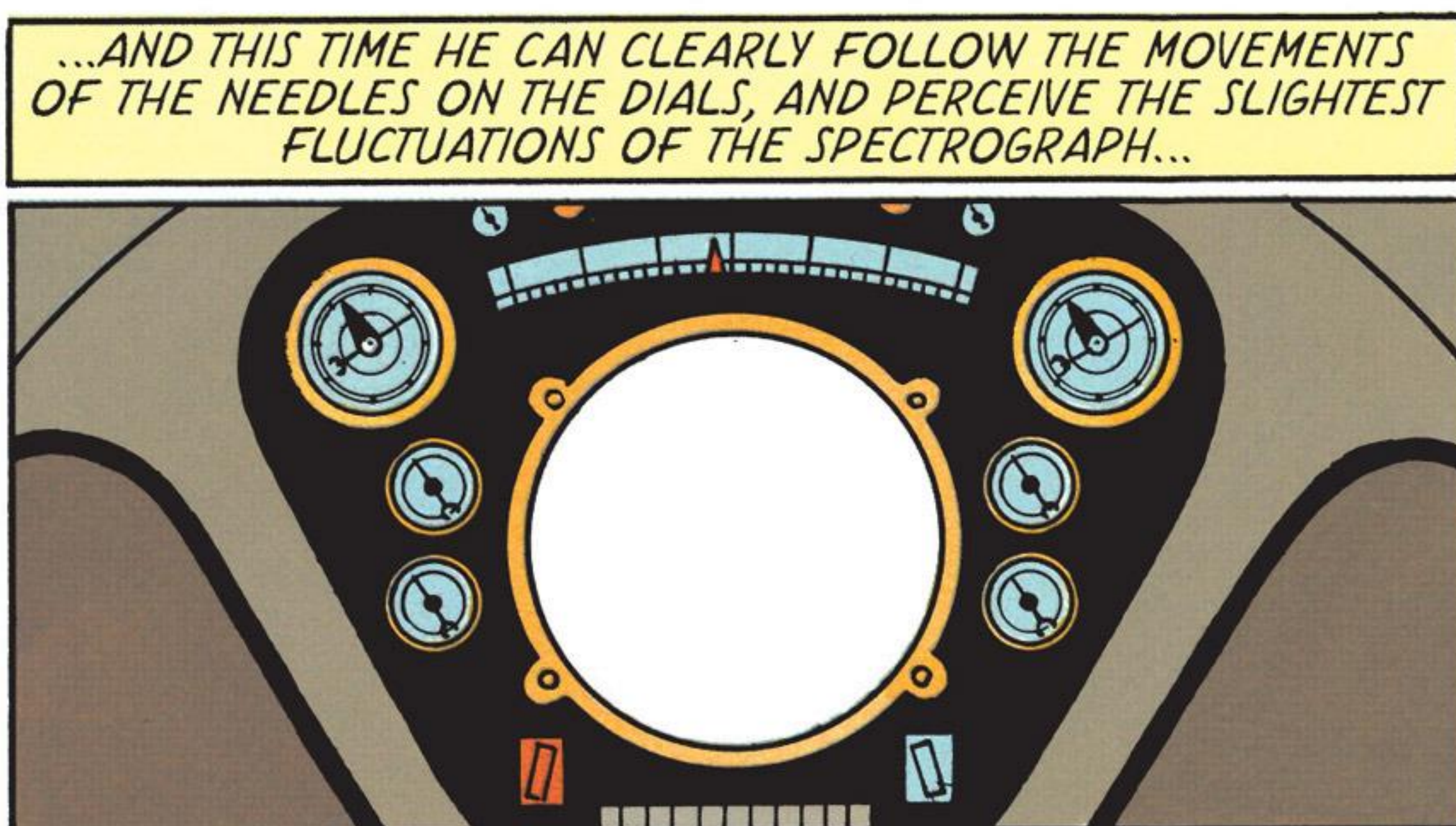
Let's proceed methodically!

CLICK



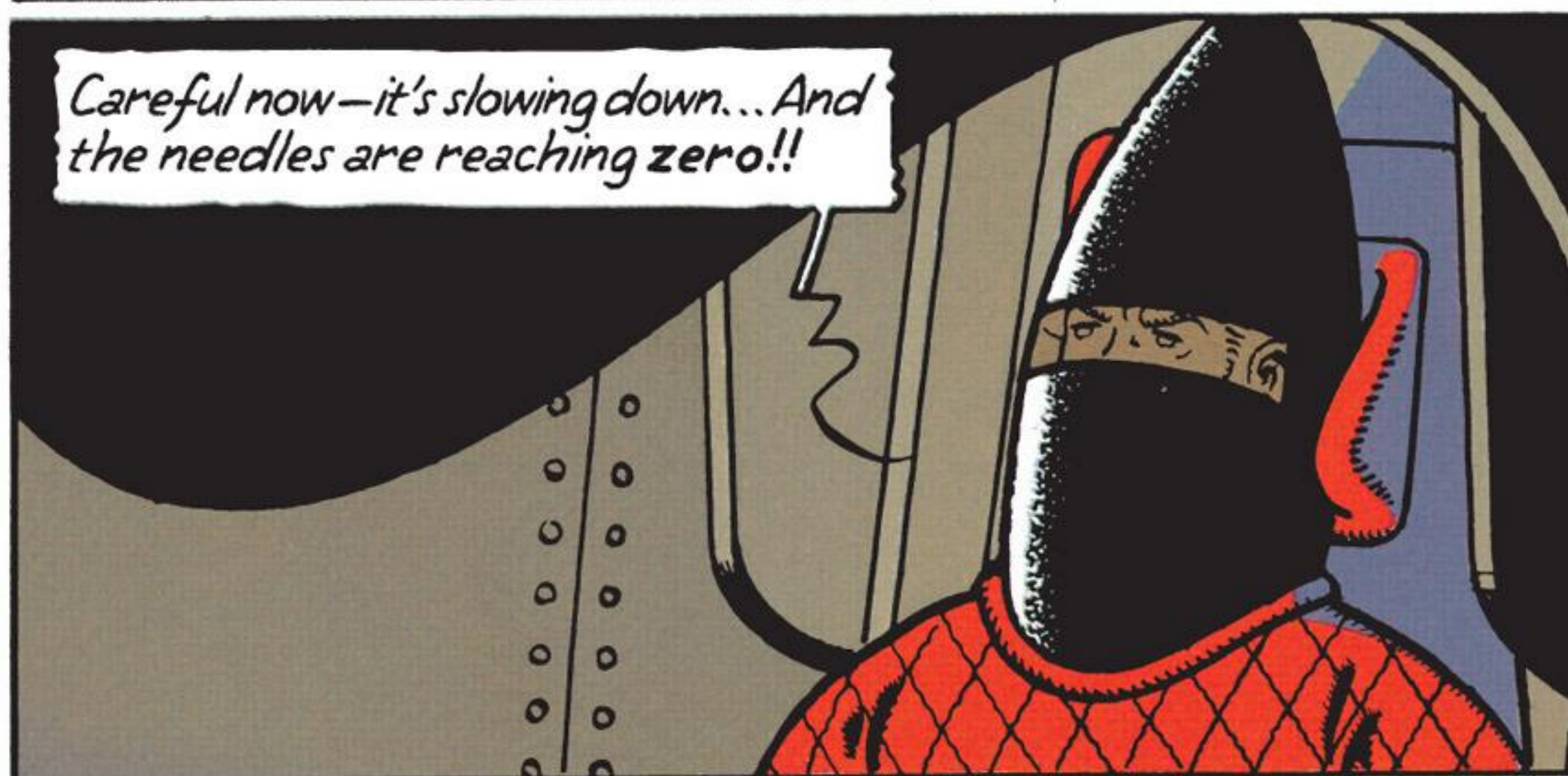
Hurrah!!!

TO HIS GREAT RELIEF, THE CHRONOSCAPHE STARTS SMOOTHLY...

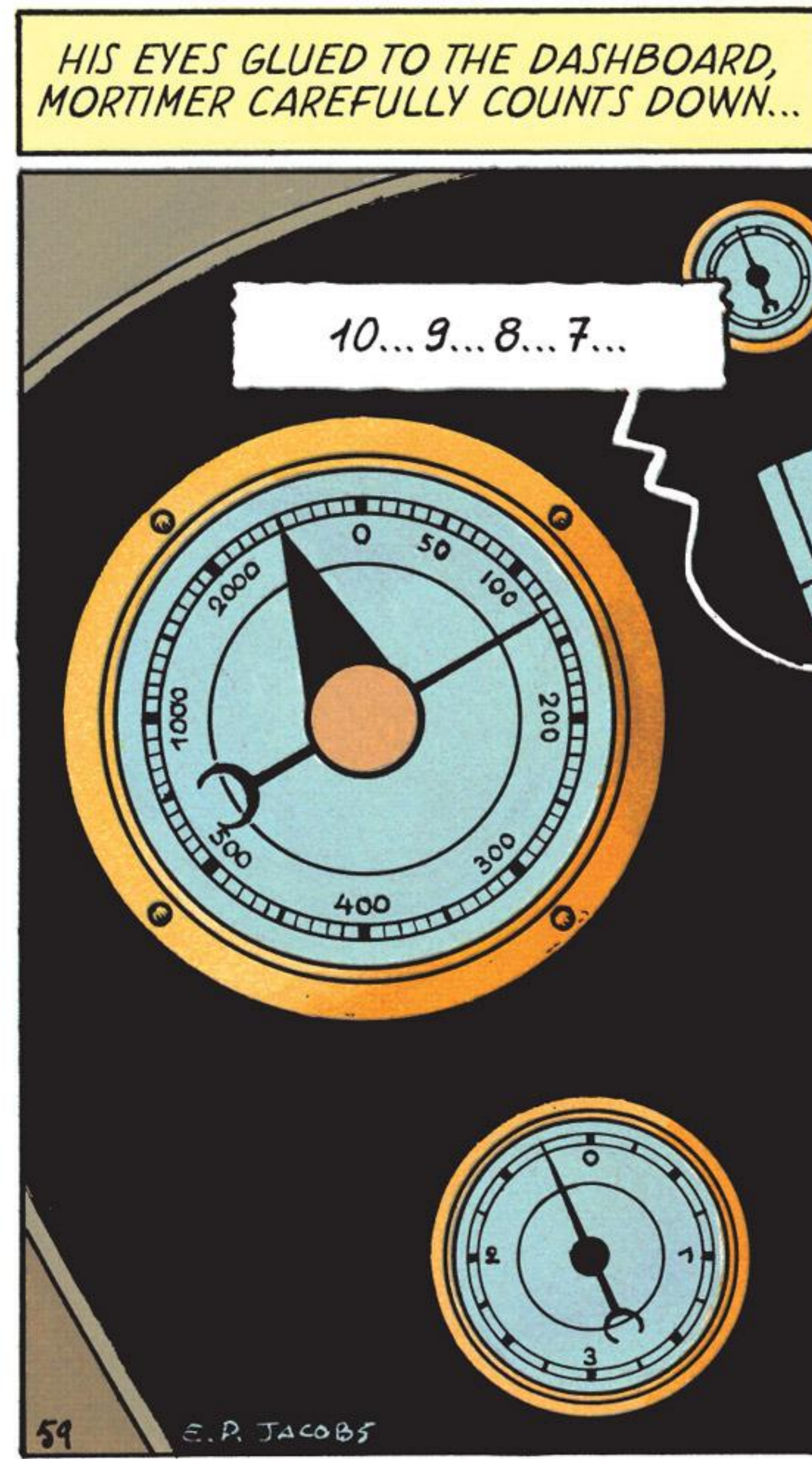


...AND THIS TIME HE CAN CLEARLY FOLLOW THE MOVEMENTS OF THE NEEDLES ON THE DIALS, AND PERCEIVE THE SLIGHTEST FLUCTUATIONS OF THE SPECTROGRAPH...

...THE LUMINOUS INTENSITY OF WHICH INCREASES BY THE SECOND!



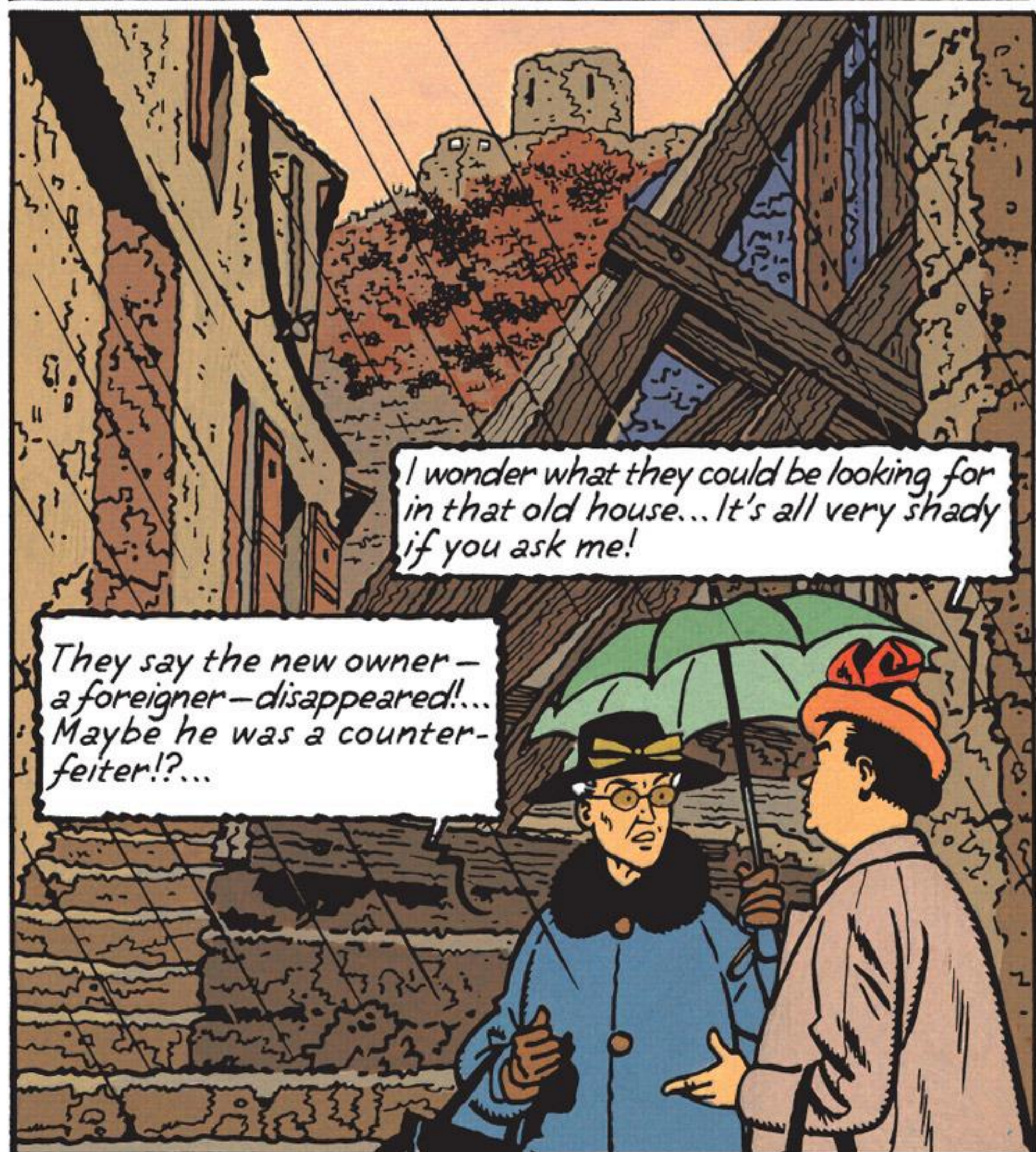
Careful now — it's slowing down... And the needles are reaching zero!!



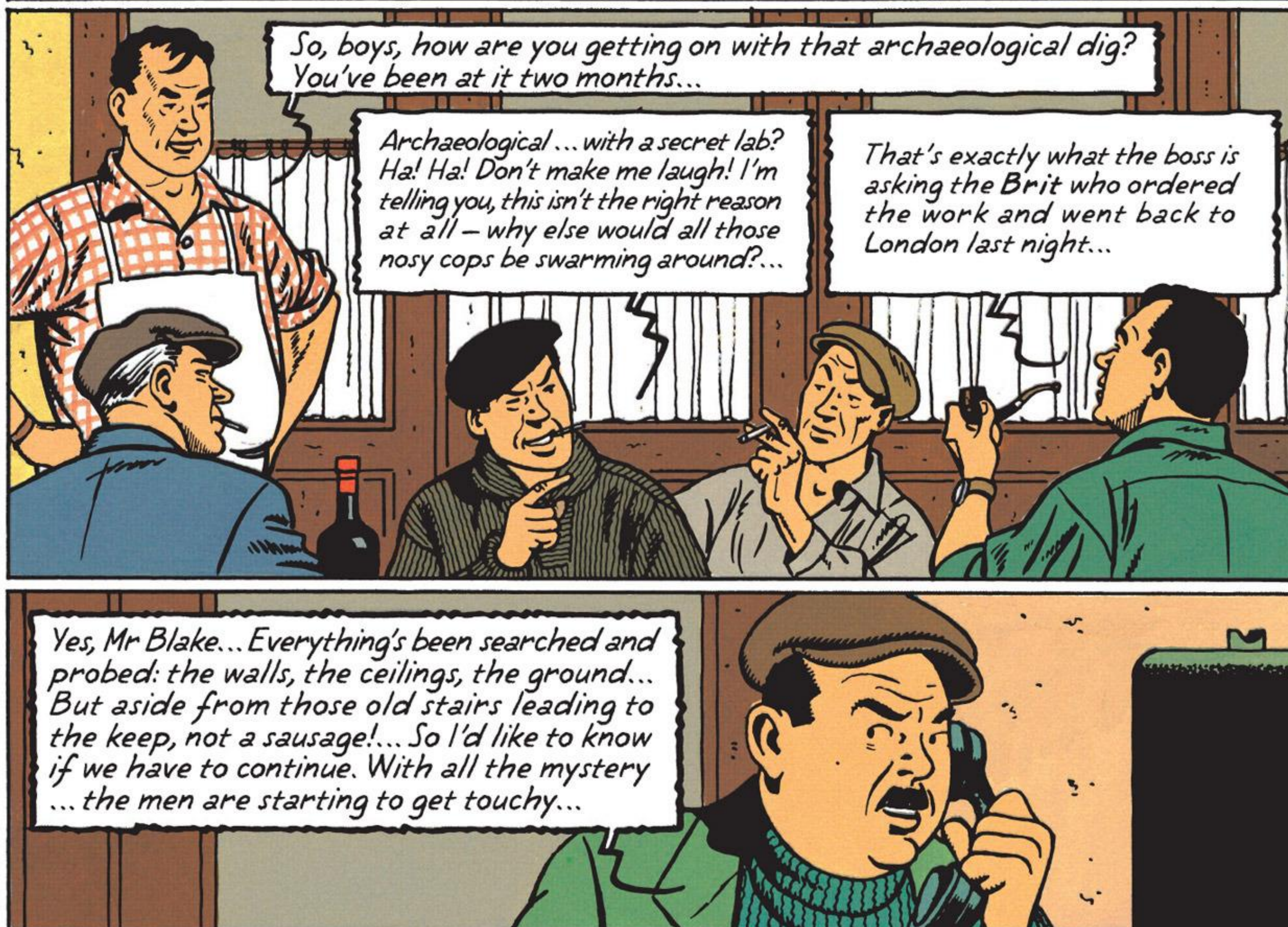
10... 9... 8... 7...

HIS EYES GLUED TO THE DASHBOARD, MORTIMER CAREFULLY COUNTS DOWN...

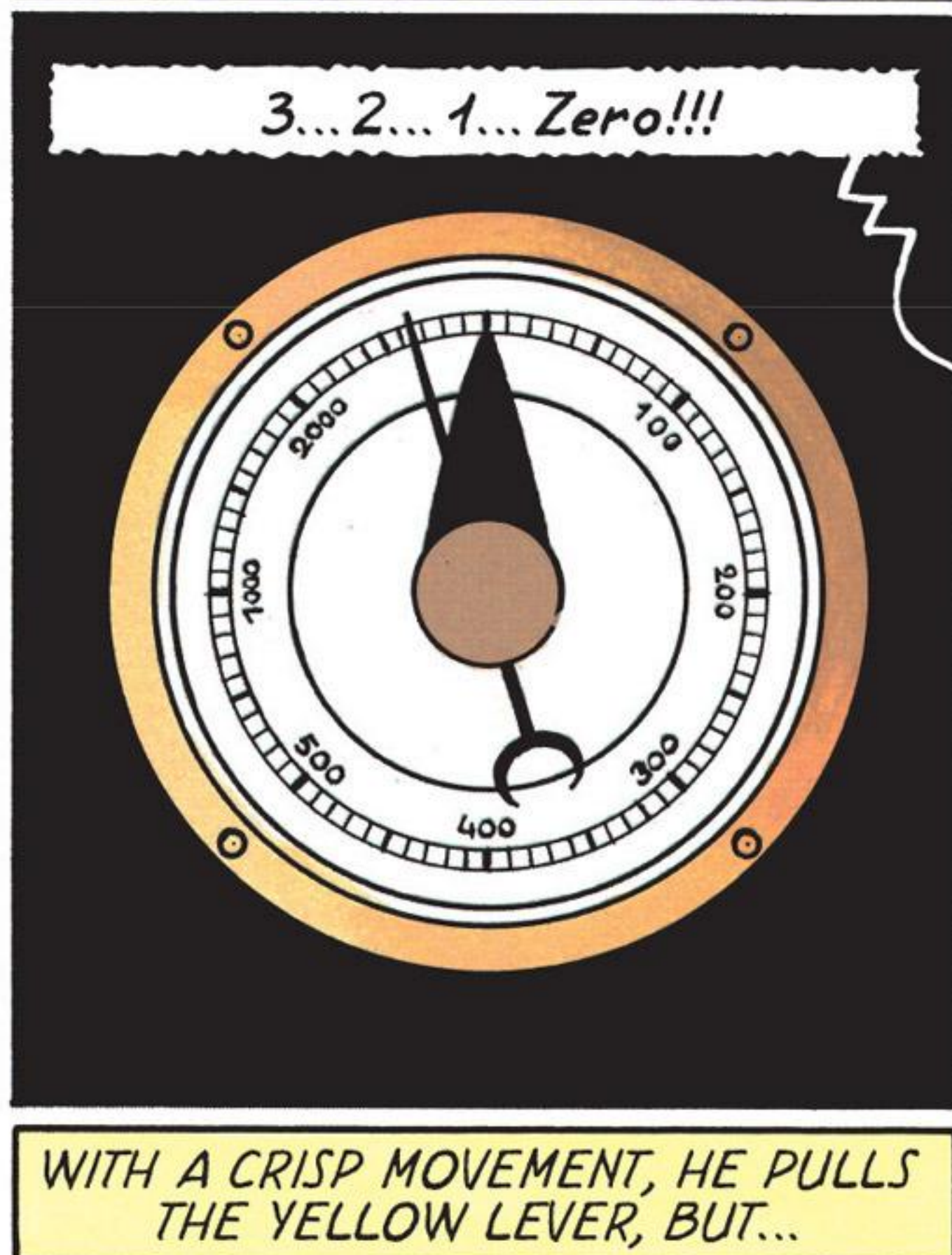
BUT AS MORTIMER COMES PROGRESSIVELY CLOSER TO THE PRESENT, IN THE STREETS OF LA ROCHE-GUYON PEOPLE ARE SPECULATING...



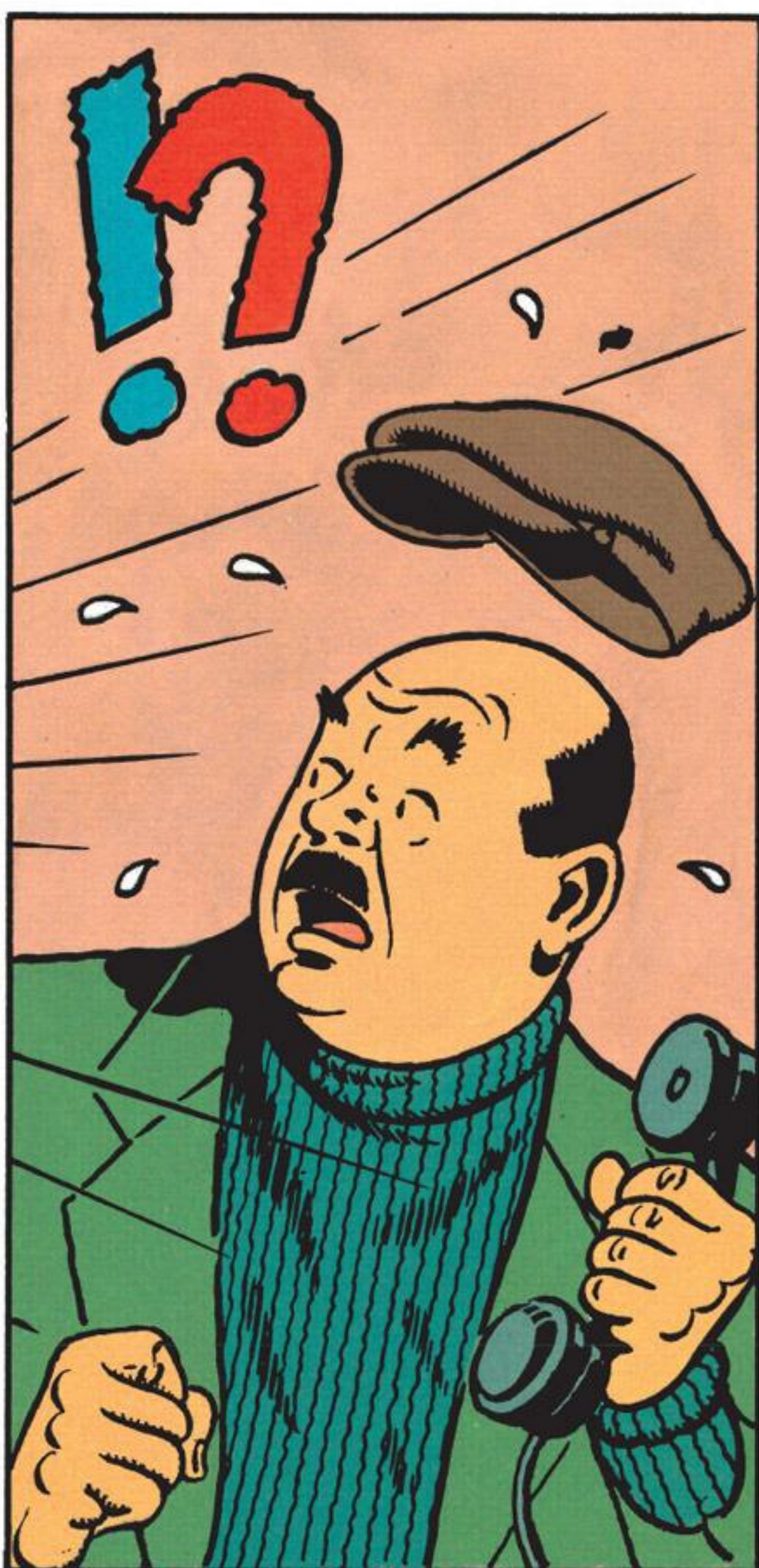
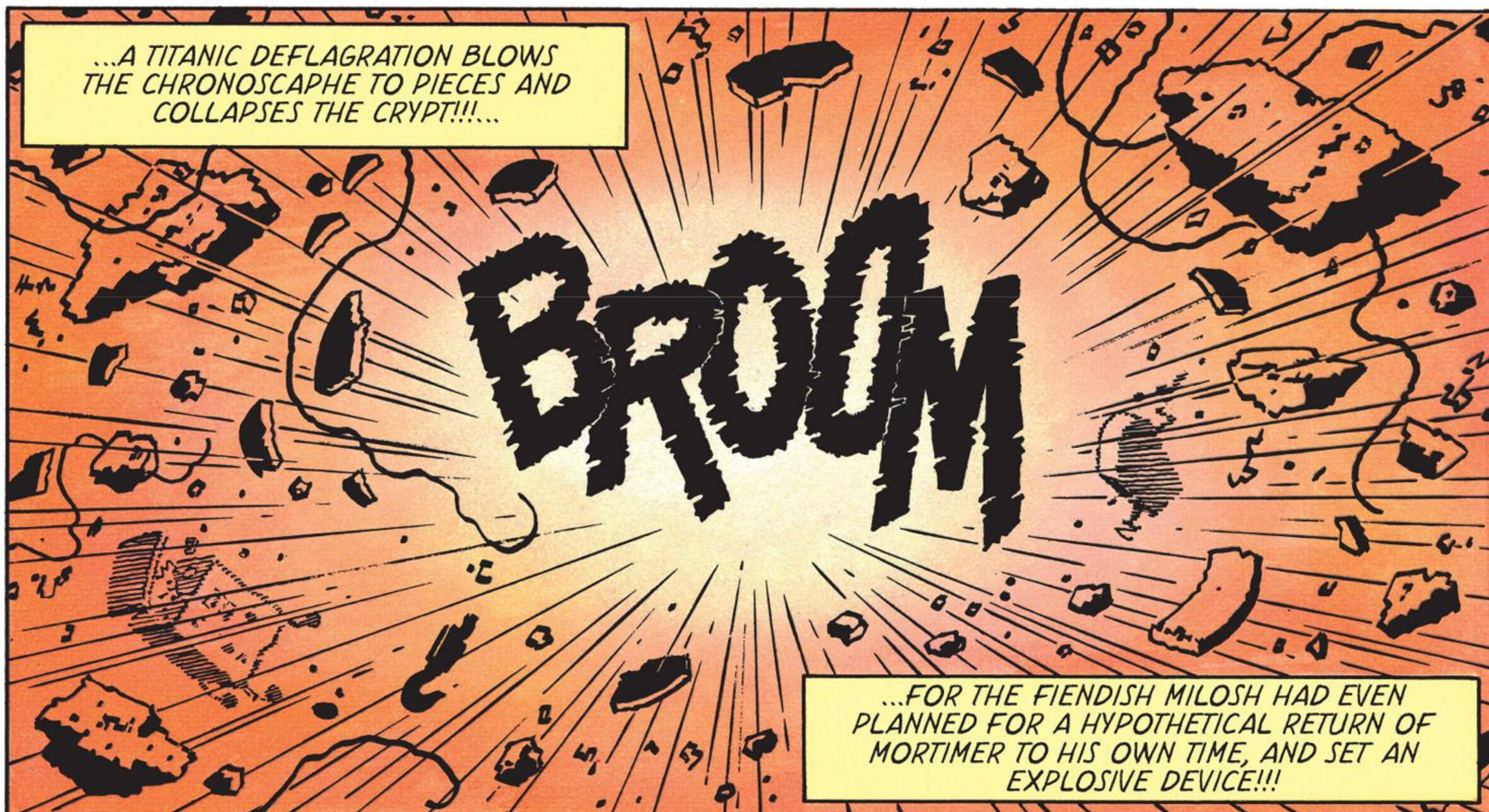
...IN THE NEIGHBOURING BAR, TOO, AT LUNCHTIME...



FOR MORTIMER, HOWEVER, THE FATEFUL MOMENT HAS ARRIVED... HIS THROAT DRY, HE COUNTS DOWN THE LAST FEW SECONDS...



...A TITANIC DEFLAGRATION BLOWS THE CHRONOSCAPHE TO PIECES AND COLLAPSES THE CRYPT!!!...



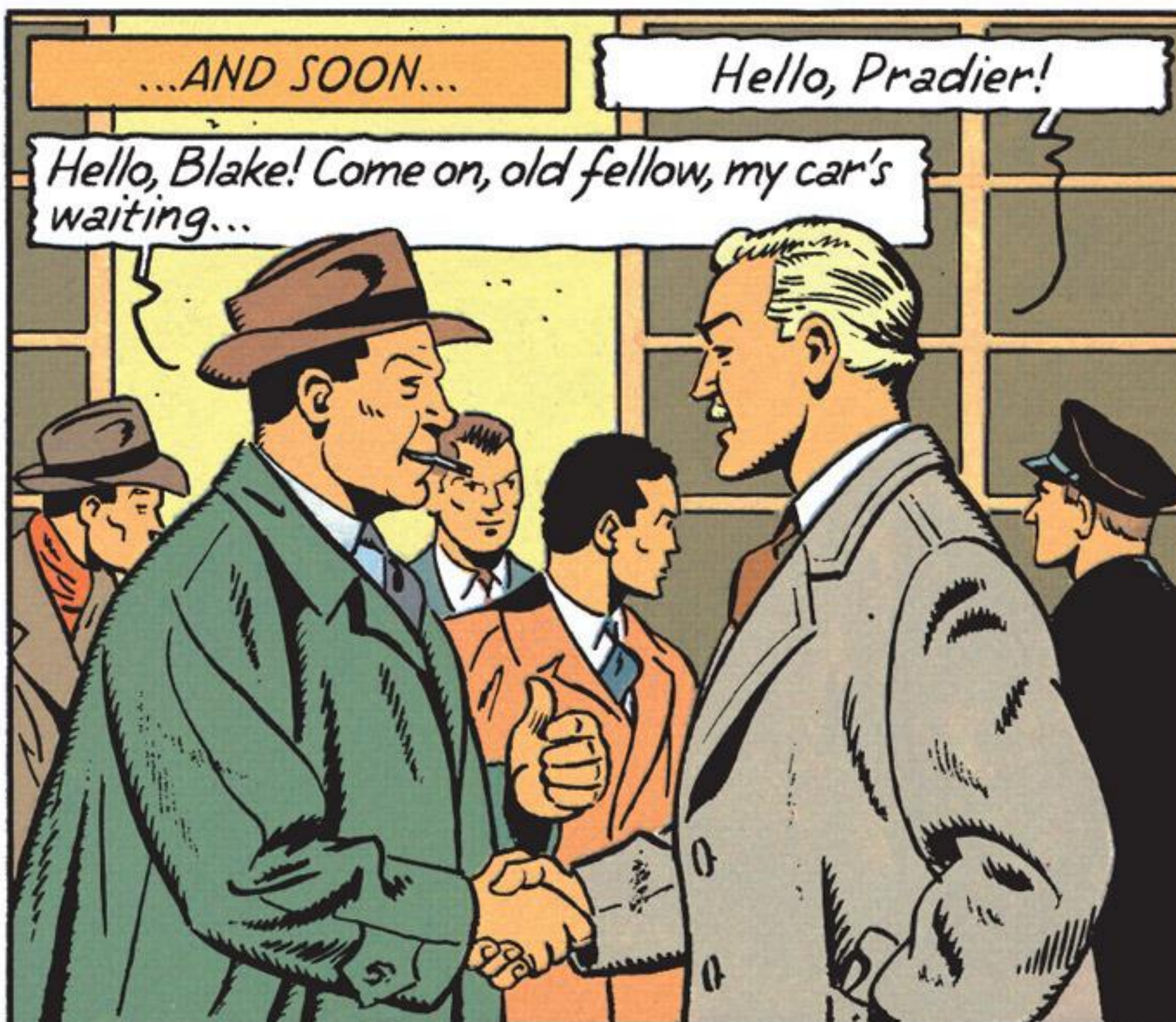
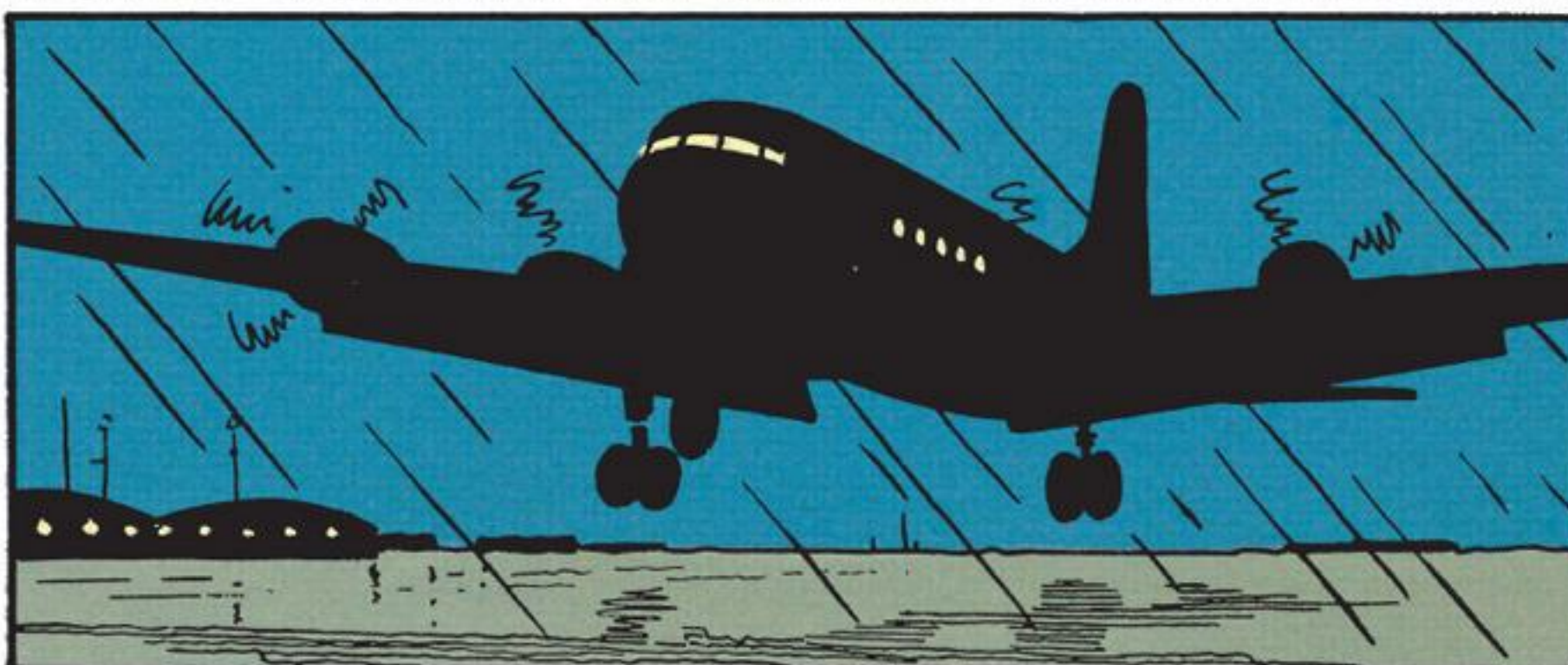
THAT EVENING, AT ORLY AIRPORT, COMMISSIONER PRADIER OF THE DST* IS WAITING FOR CAPTAIN BLAKE TO RETURN FROM LONDON, WHERE HE'D BEEN URGENTLY SUMMONED BY THE FOREIGN OFFICE.



...Get France Soir... All the latest on the Mortimer mystery... The DST is on the case... Get France Soir!

Hmm! I could've done without the publicity!

BUT THE FLIGHT FROM LONDON IS LANDING...



...AND SOON...

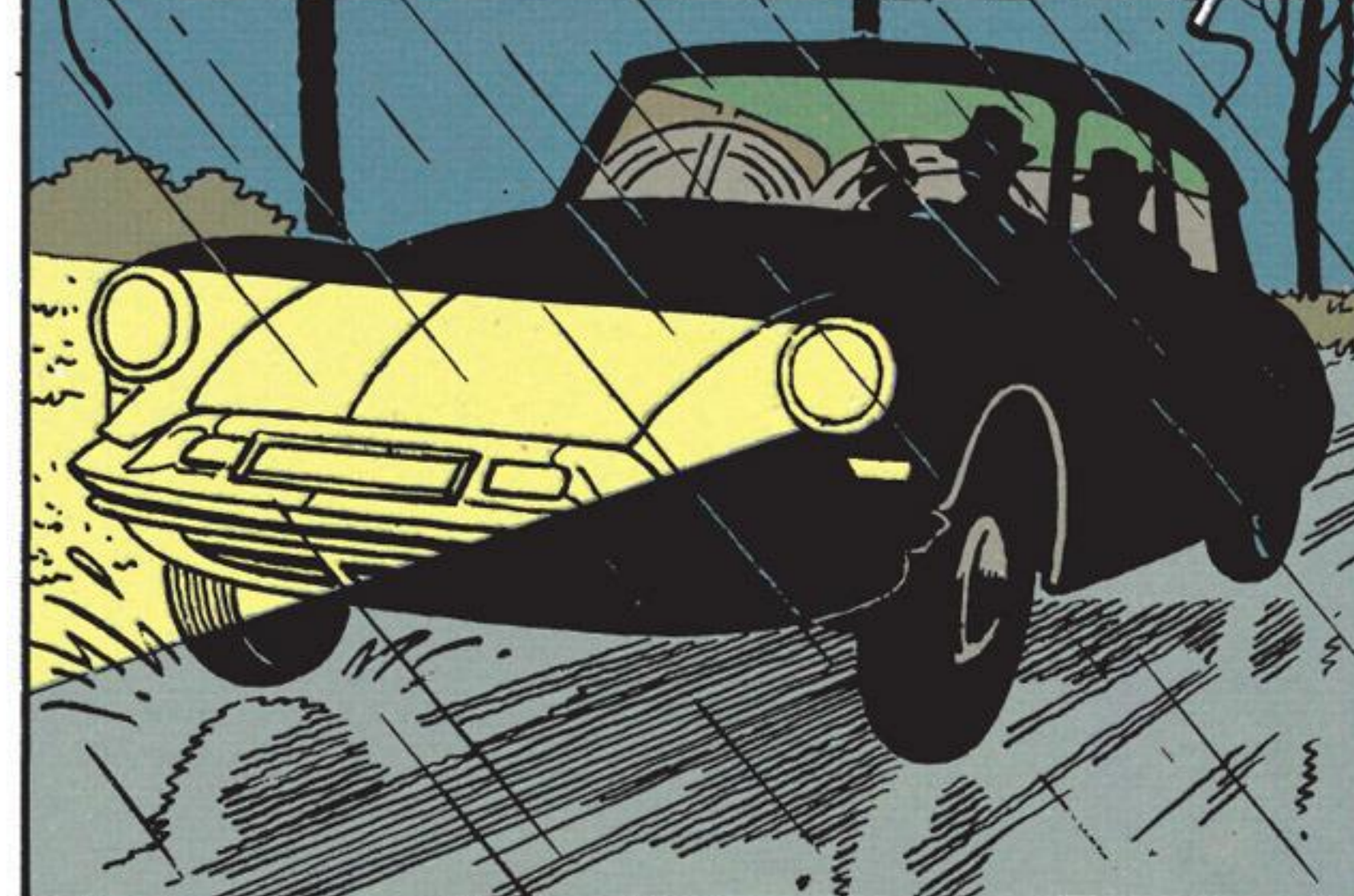
Hello, Pradier!

Hello, Blake! Come on, old fellow, my car's waiting...

AS THE CITROEN DS HURTTLES THROUGH THE NIGHT, THE TWO MEN DISCUSS THE CASE...

Just between you and me, this whole thing makes no sense!... And if it weren't for that shredded suit and that strange, shattered device he had on his wrist, I'd say that Mortimer is completely out of his mind – or pulling our legs...

Either way, our authorities – and yours – believe that this absurd story must be kept secret at all costs and the press must not be allowed to get a hint of what the ... experiment was about!



The Mortimer mystery

What exactly happened to the famous British scientist?

Paris, 10 November

In our previous special editions we have already reported on the puzzling circumstances in which Professor Philip Mortimer was found unconscious in the ruins of the Bove of the Maiden, which had just been destroyed by a colossal explosion. We have since learnt that the scientist was wearing a sort of hermetic suit at the time – which the deflagration reduced to a few strips of sticky matter – and that he had on his wrist a small, heavily damaged device, which so far no one has been able to identify, or devise the purpose or working of it.

Hallucinations, madness ... or military secrets?...

Immediately taken to Dr Martin's clinic, Professor Mortimer has been there ever since, practically cut off from the outside world. The police are guarding the place vigilantly, controlling all comings and goings and mercilessly turning away anyone without the proper credentials!... However, in spite of that official blackout, we've managed to learn that the professor, who has since partially returned to consciousness, expressed himself with extreme

incoherence. To such a point, in fact, that the doctors concluded his prodigious brain may not have withstood the shock. In any case, it'll take many months before the effects of the trauma disappear.

DST, MI5 and archaeology!

We have the distinct impression that the authorities are doing everything in their power to stop the press from digging deeper into these disconcerting events. It is a regrettable attitude, as it tends to foster the most absurd of hypotheses. As for us, we would like to

express some doubts as to the 'archaeological' value of the systematic search of the old house in La Roche-Guyon that Captain Blake (head of MI5!) has been overseeing for the past two months. And while the workers, no doubt duly lectured, did indeed discover an ancient staircase linking the Bove to the keep and a hitherto undiscovered crypt, we claim that what they were truly looking for WAS, IN FACT, PROFESSOR MORTIMER!

Where was Mortimer?...

How and why did the Englishman suddenly appear, wearing a strange costume and after the aforementioned explosion, IN A PLACE WHERE HE OBVIOUSLY HADN'T BEEN? That is what we would like to know!

INDEED, THE PRESS HAS ALREADY CAPTURED THE IMAGINATION OF THE PUBLIC...



THE SECRET CRYPT IN THE BOVE OF THE MAIDEN AFTER THE EXPLOSION
It's in the back that Professor Mortimer was discovered, half buried in the rubble.

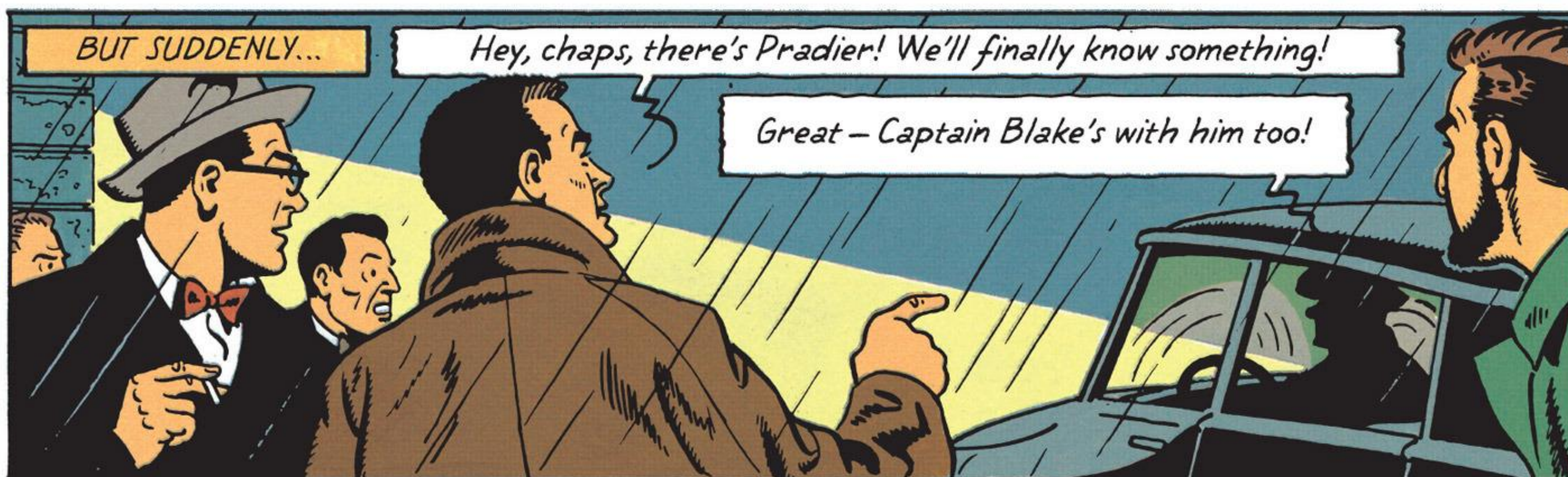
IN FRONT OF DR MARTIN'S CLINIC WHERE MORTIMER IS BEING TENDED TO, A WATCHFUL PACK OF REPORTERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS ARE PERMANENTLY STATIONED...



Can't get anywhere near the professor – that blasted doctor won't hear of it!...

So, if I understand correctly, we'll be here for the night!... What a job! Good Lord, what a job!!!

BUT SUDDENLY...



Hey, chaps, there's Pradier! We'll finally know something!

Great – Captain Blake's with him too!

A few words for the television, Commissioner?

Nothing for the moment, gentlemen...

Captain, a statement?...

Sorry, no comment...



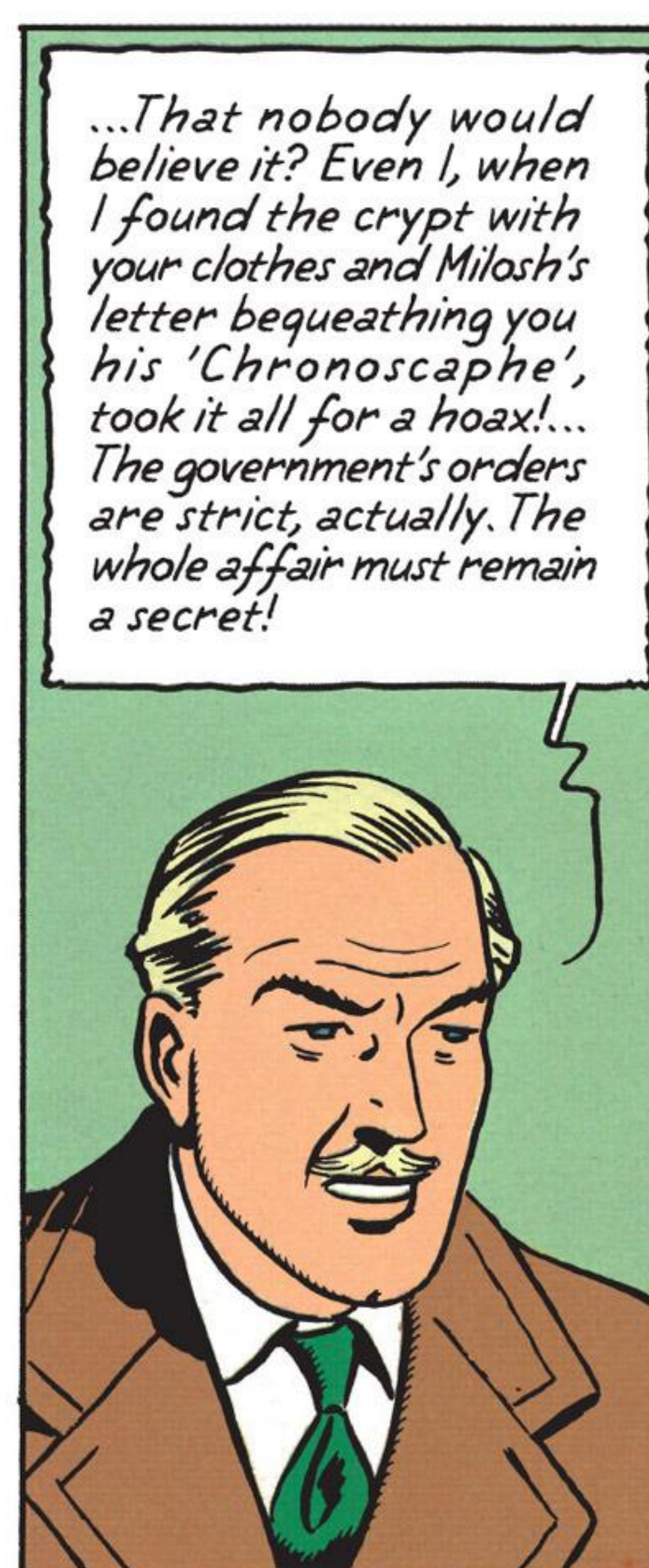
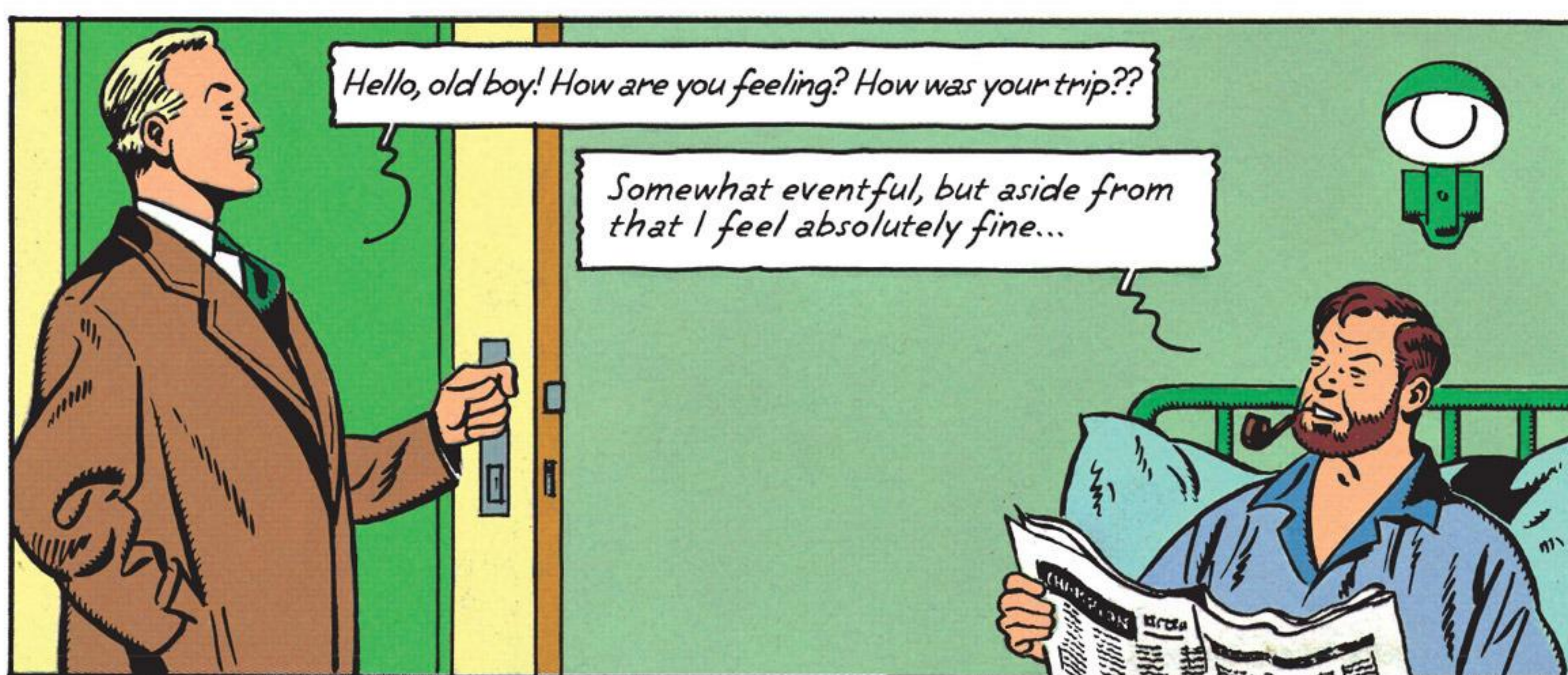
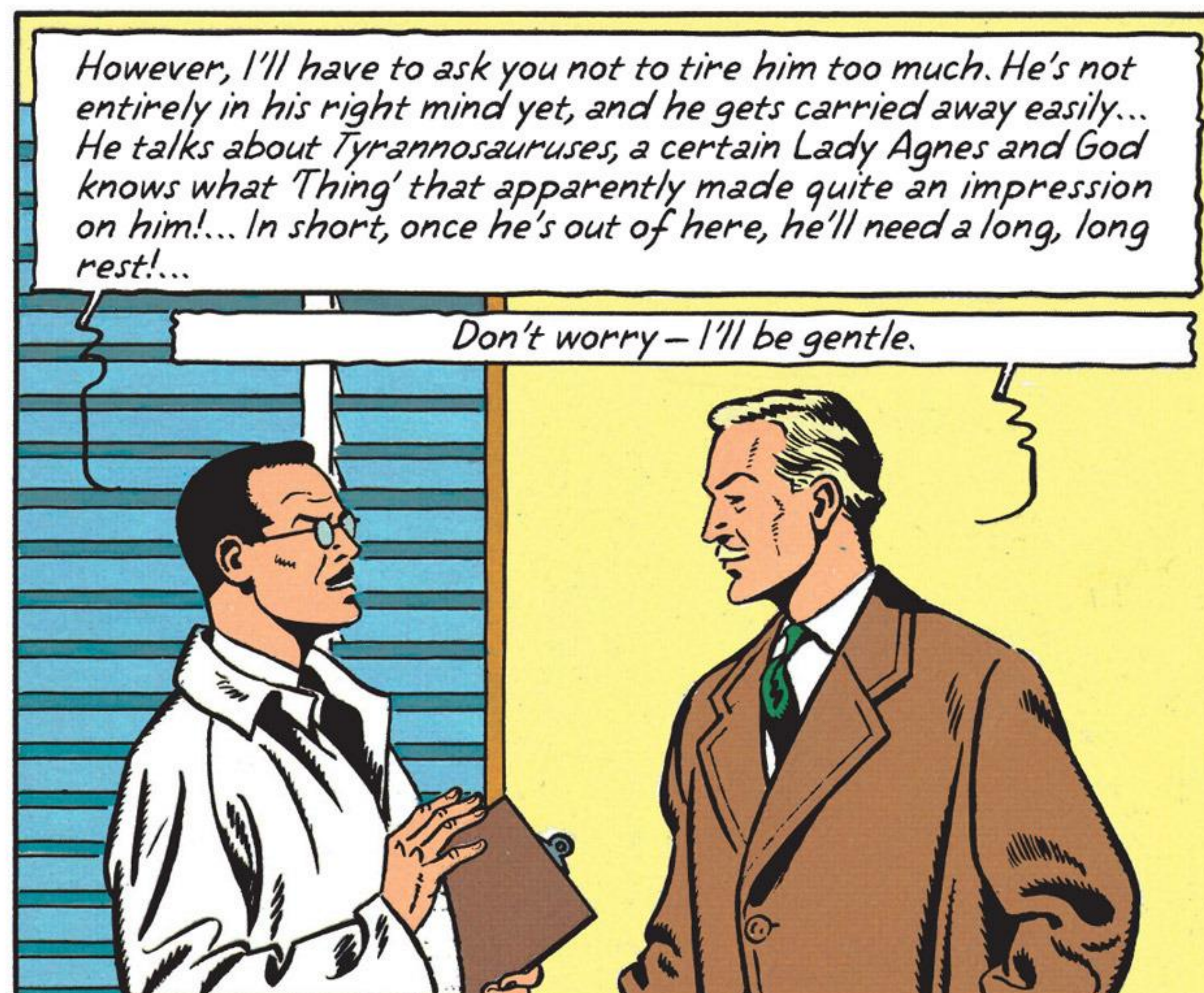
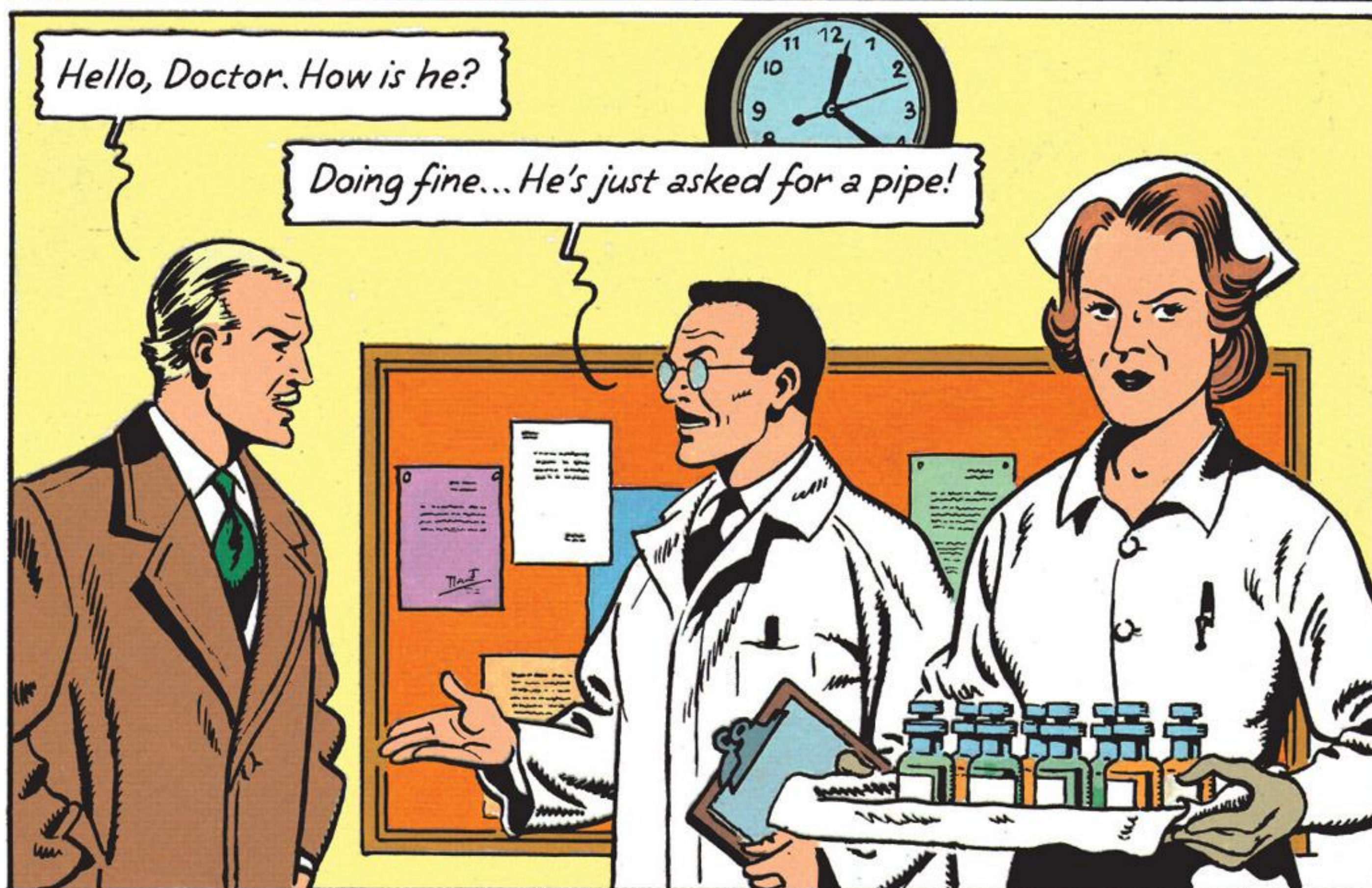
You go ahead – I'll deal with them!

Thanks!



*DIRECTION DE LA SURVEILLANCE DU TERRITOIRE – THE THEN FRENCH COUNTERINTELLIGENCE AGENCY, COUNTERPART TO MI5 (SEE S.O.S. METEORS).

LEAVING PRADIER TO HANDLE THE JOURNALISTS, BLAKE HAS GONE INTO THE CLINIC...



Still... A man of your reputation - a man I thought mellowed by experience - rushing headlong into such a trap!... What will posterity think of you?...

Oh, that I already know... I read it in a document dating from the middle of the 22nd century!... I quote: '...a kind of Dr Faust, genius for some, fraud for others...' That's what posterity's opinion of me will be!...



And now, reader friend, before we part ways, I would like to draw the obvious moral from this peculiar adventure: let's not complain overmuch about our darned time, as it has its good sides! And who knows if one day, recalling it, you too might say '*Those were the good old days!!!*'... And with that, until next time, I bid you all a very cordial farewell!!

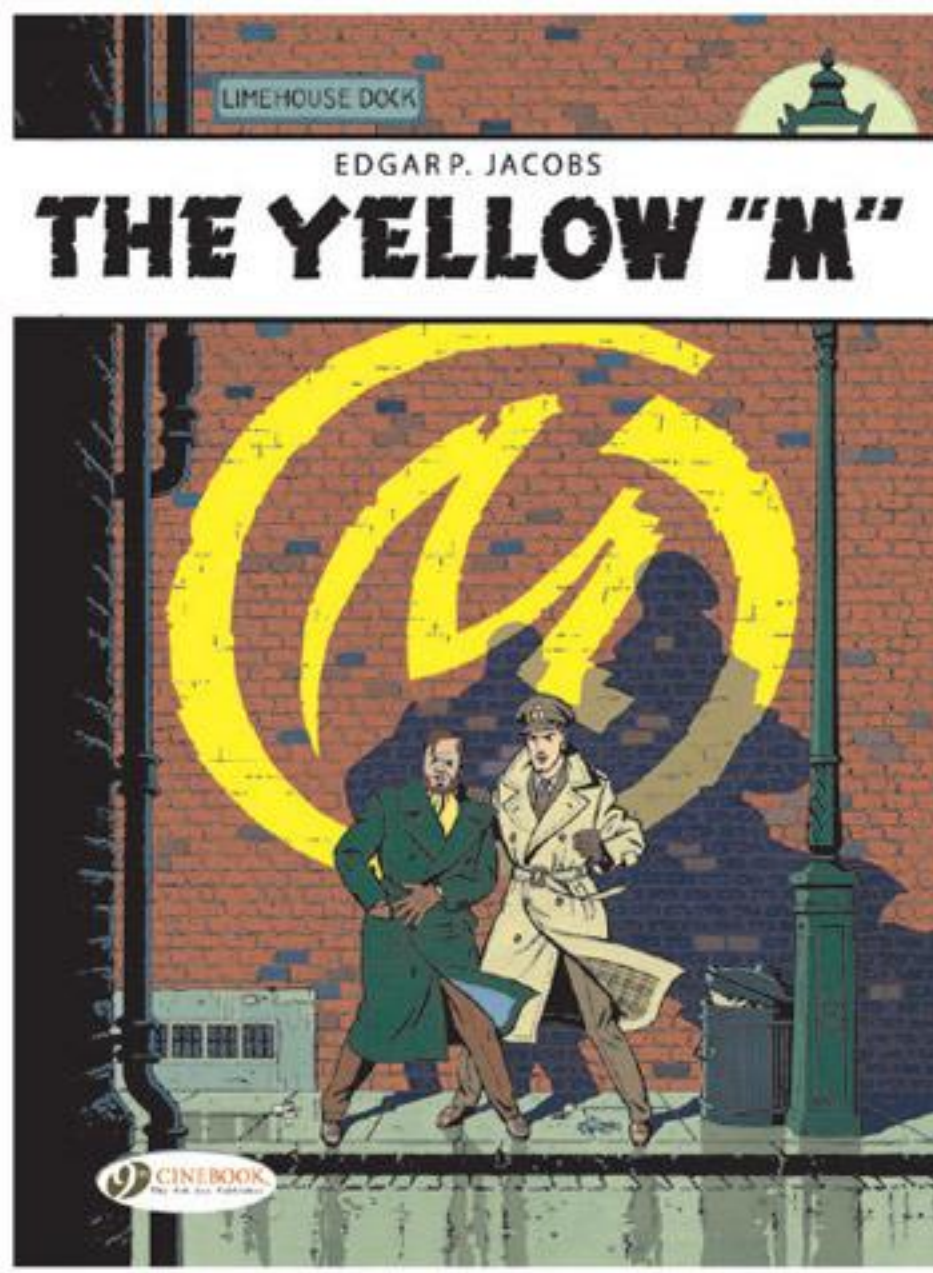


**THE
END**

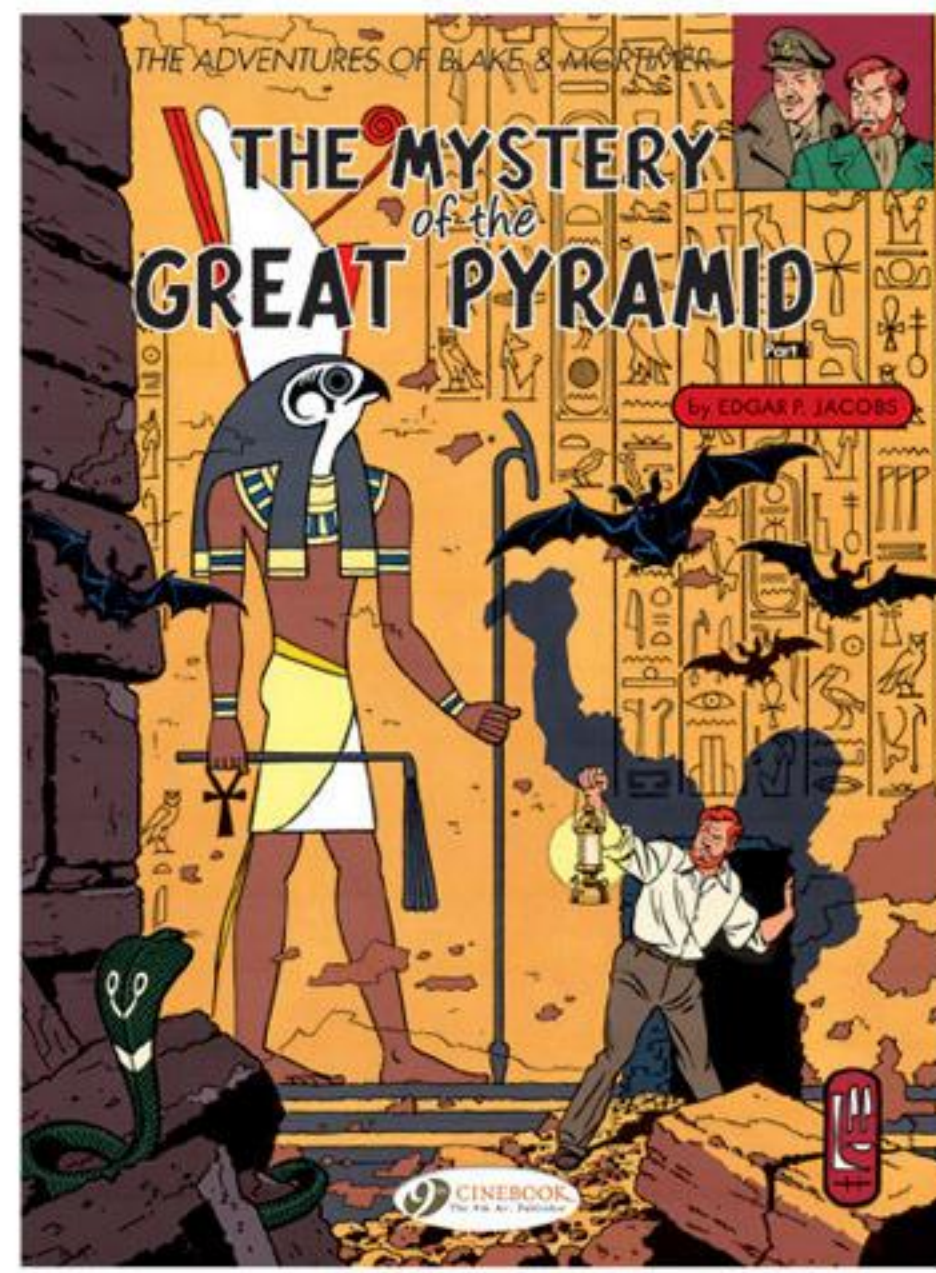


E. P. JACOBS.

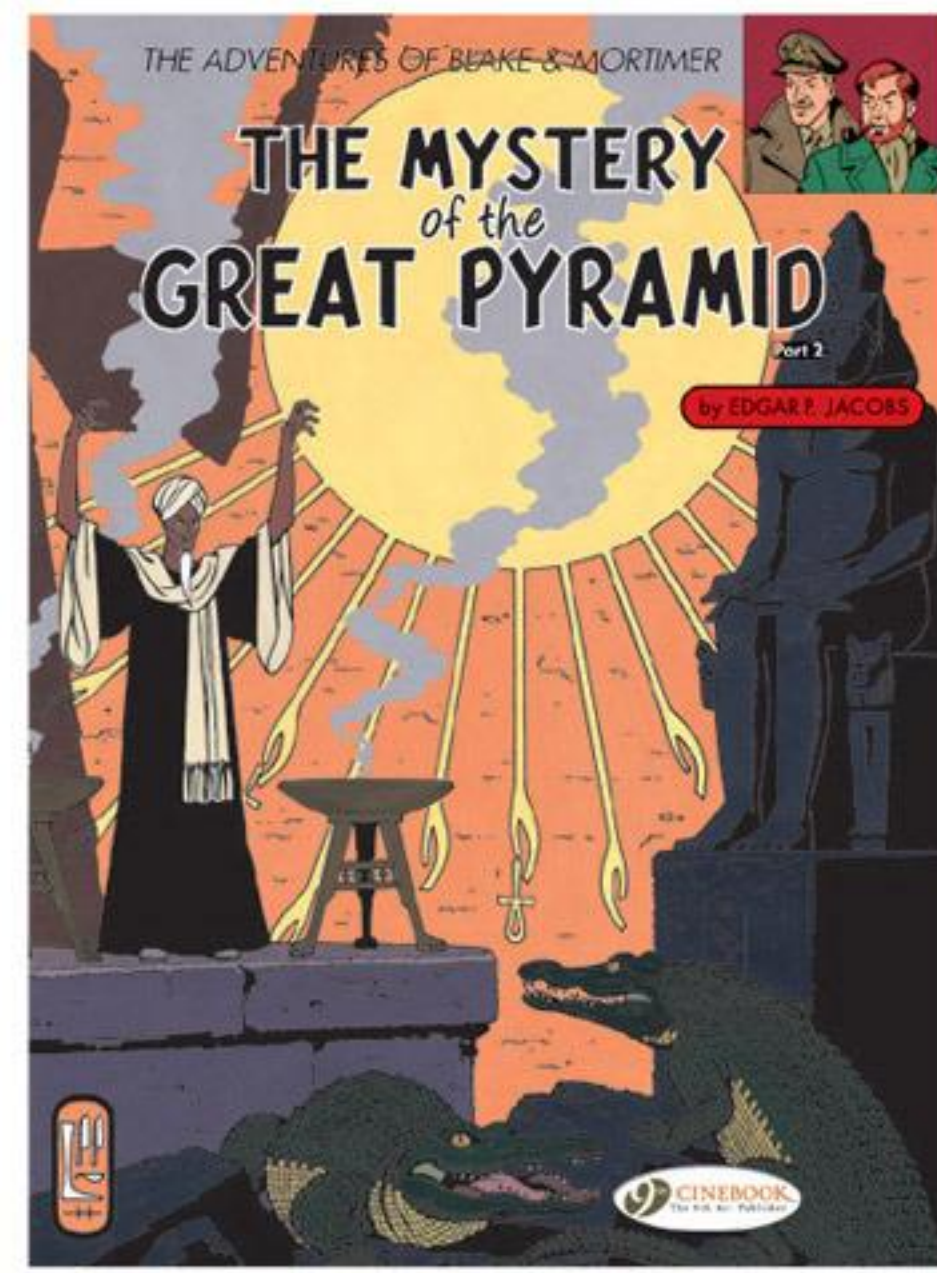
THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER



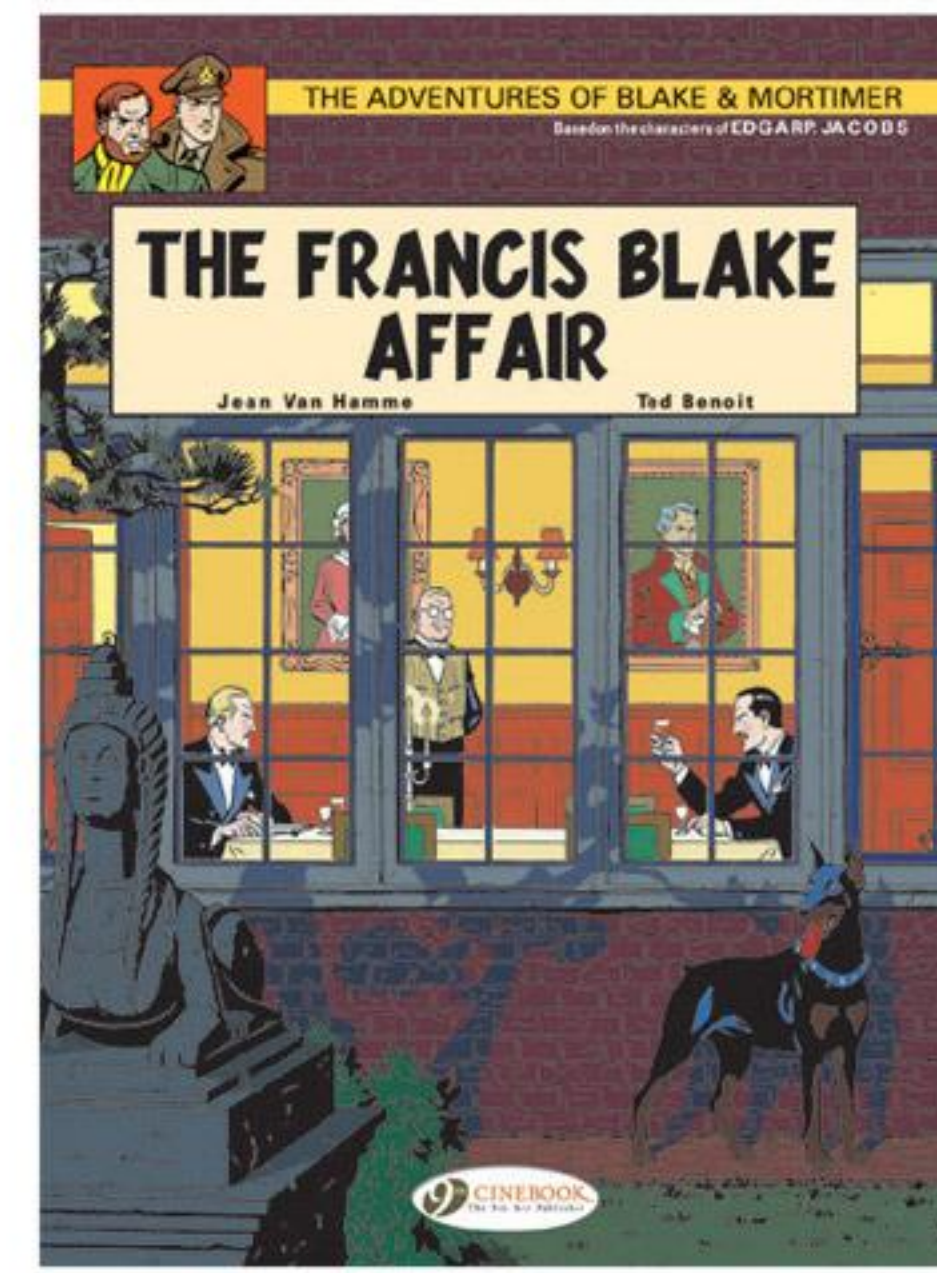
1-The Yellow "M"
EDGAR P. JACOBS



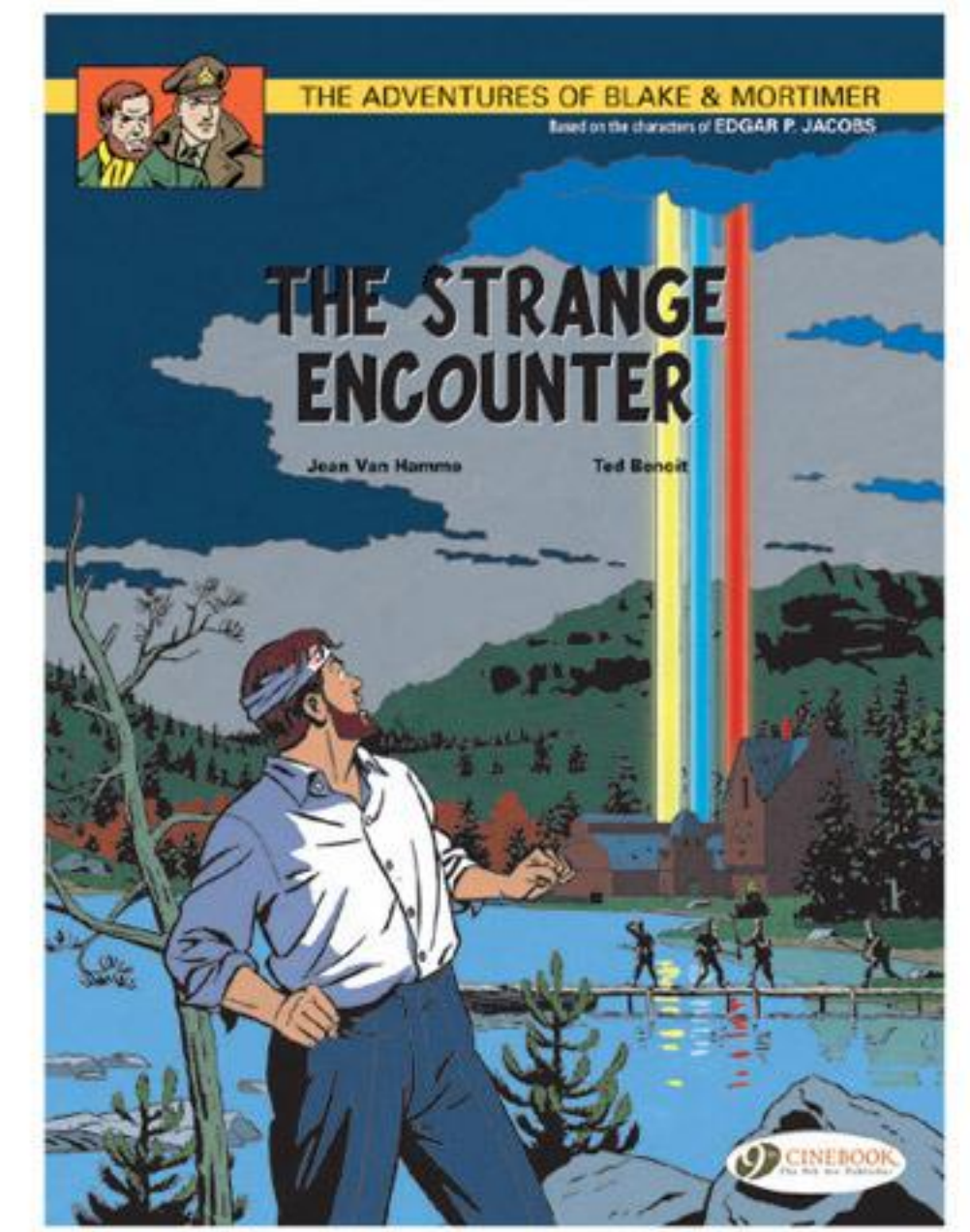
2-The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



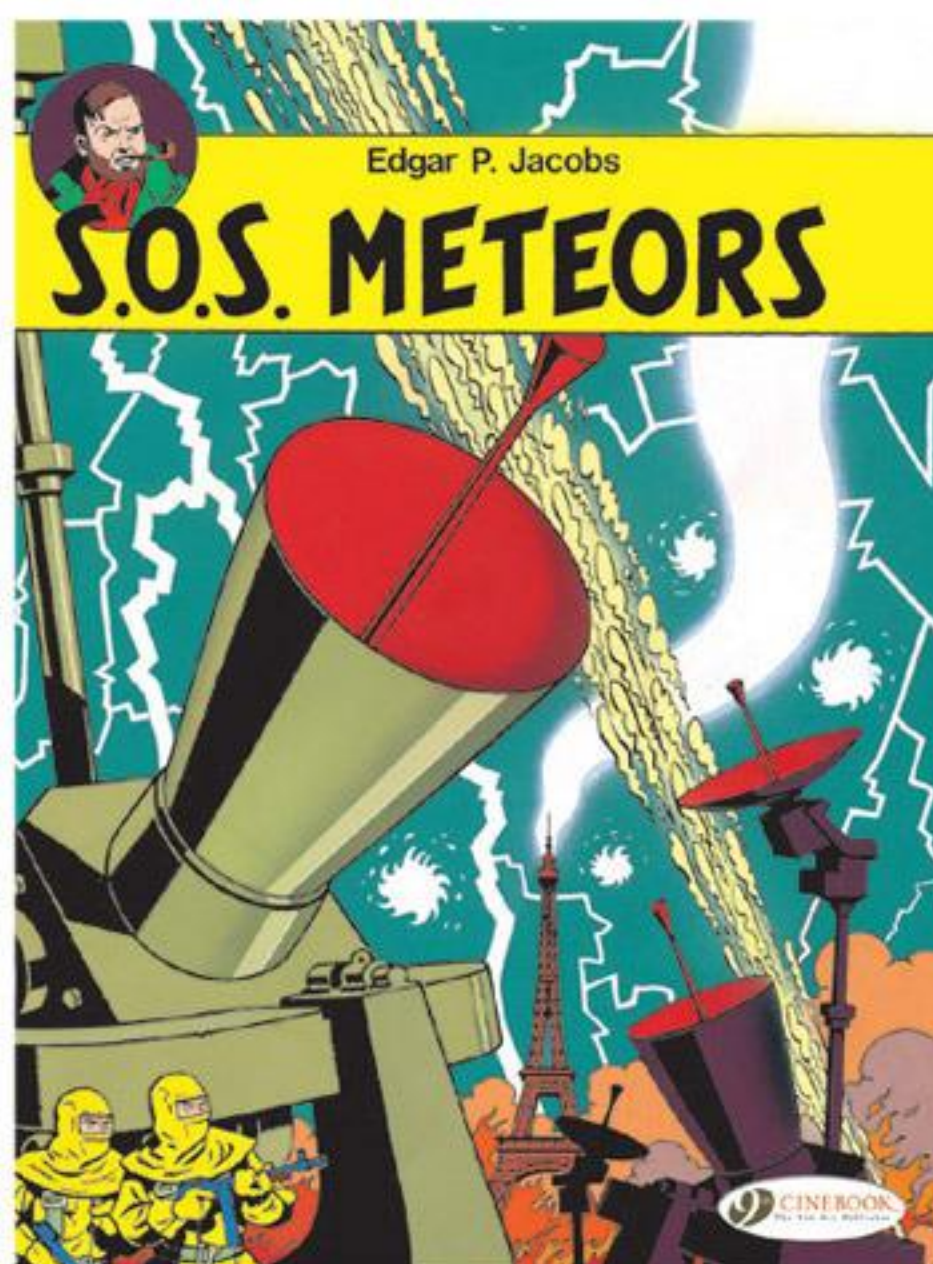
3-The Mystery of the Great Pyramid Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS



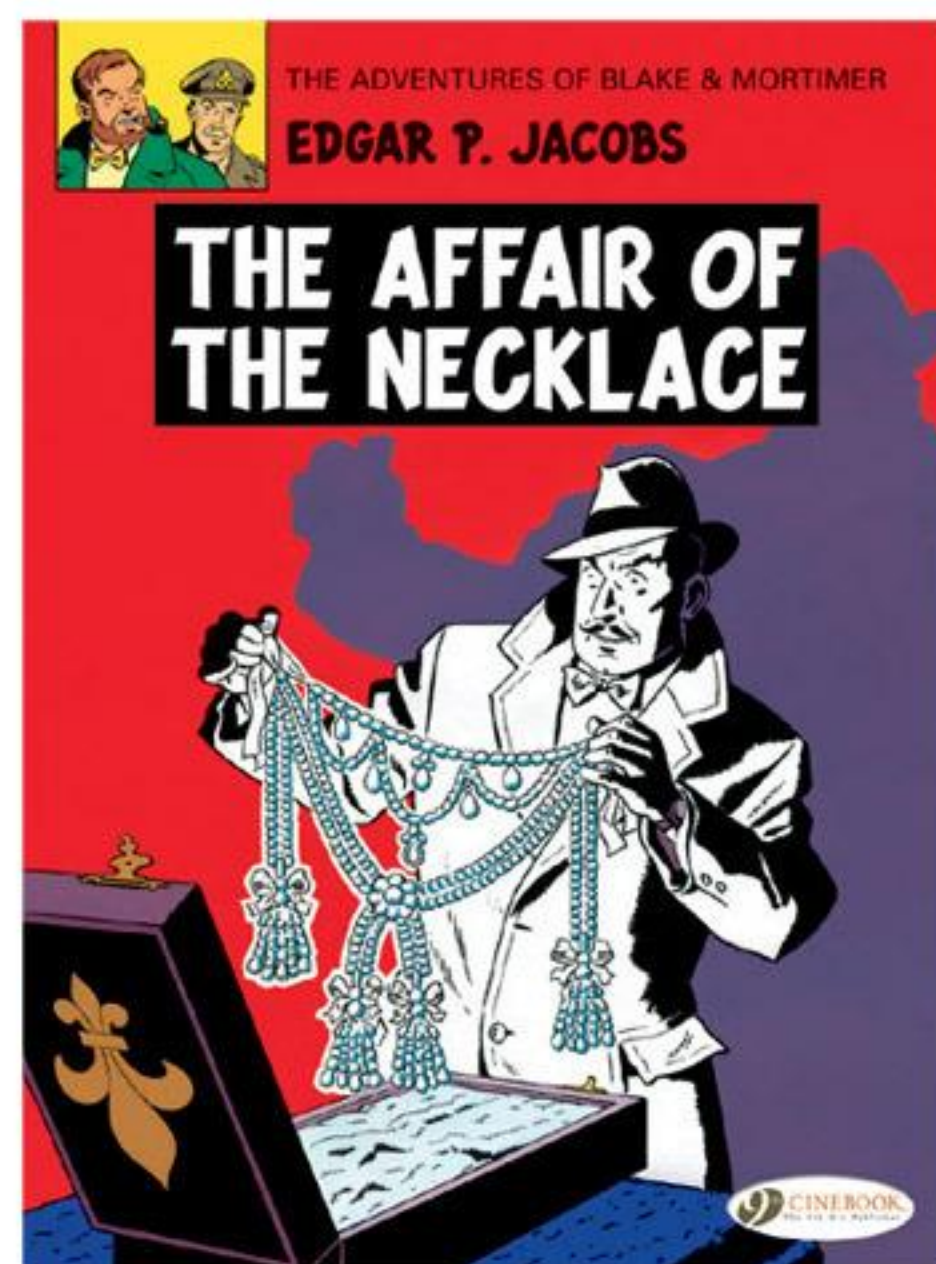
4-The Francis Blake Affair
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



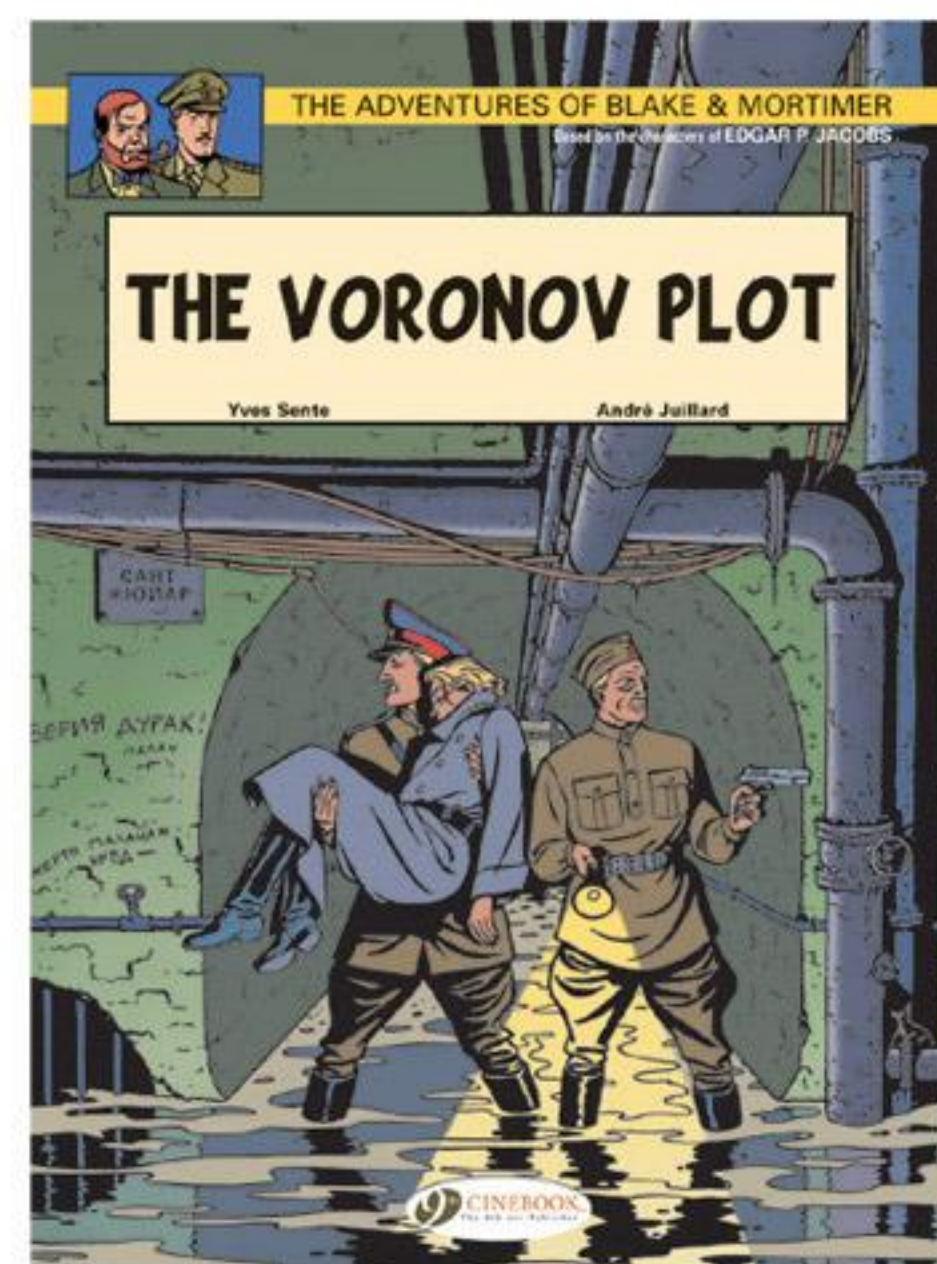
5-The Strange Encounter
VAN HAMME - BENOIT



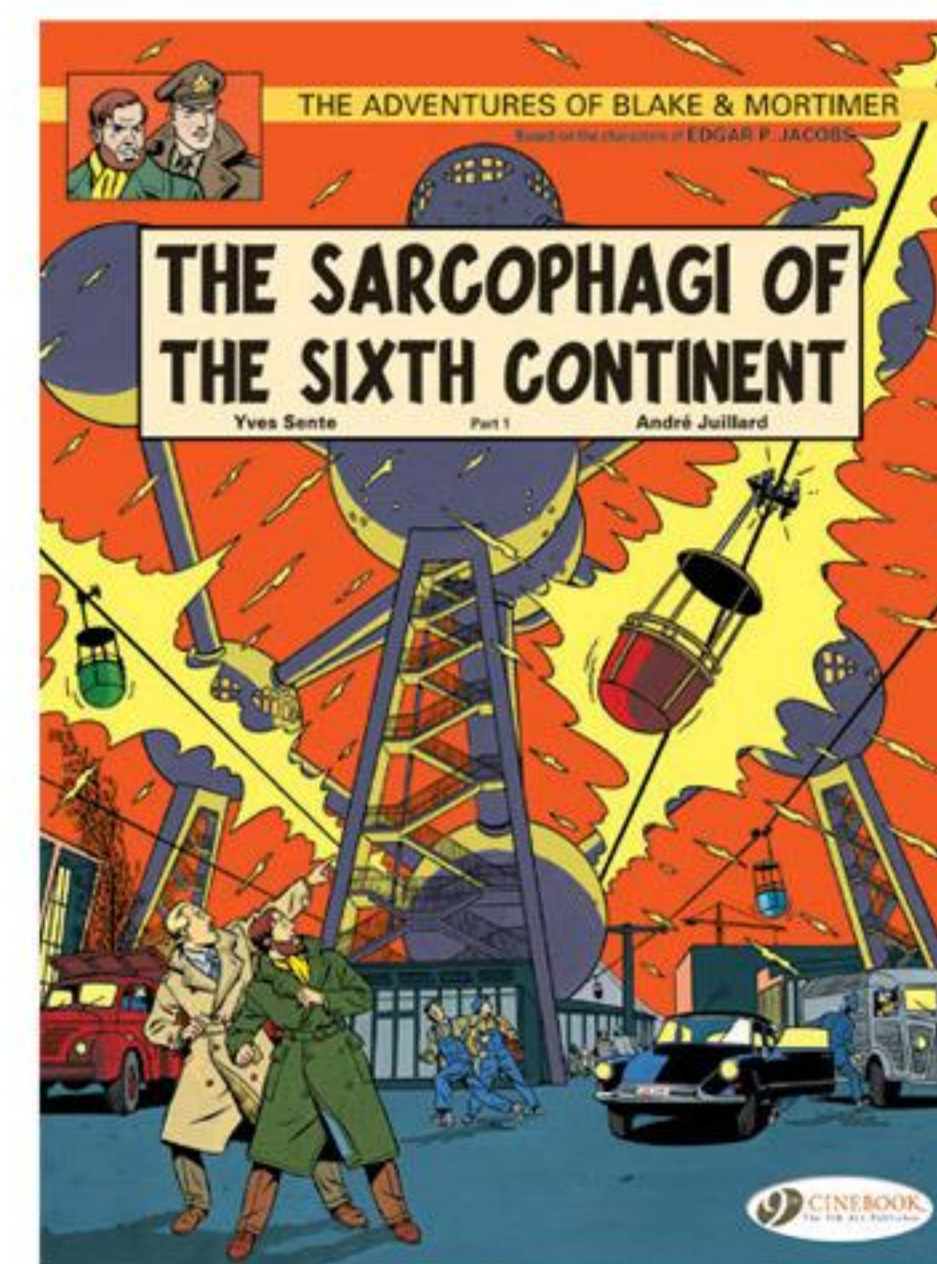
6-S.O.S. Meteors
EDGAR P. JACOBS



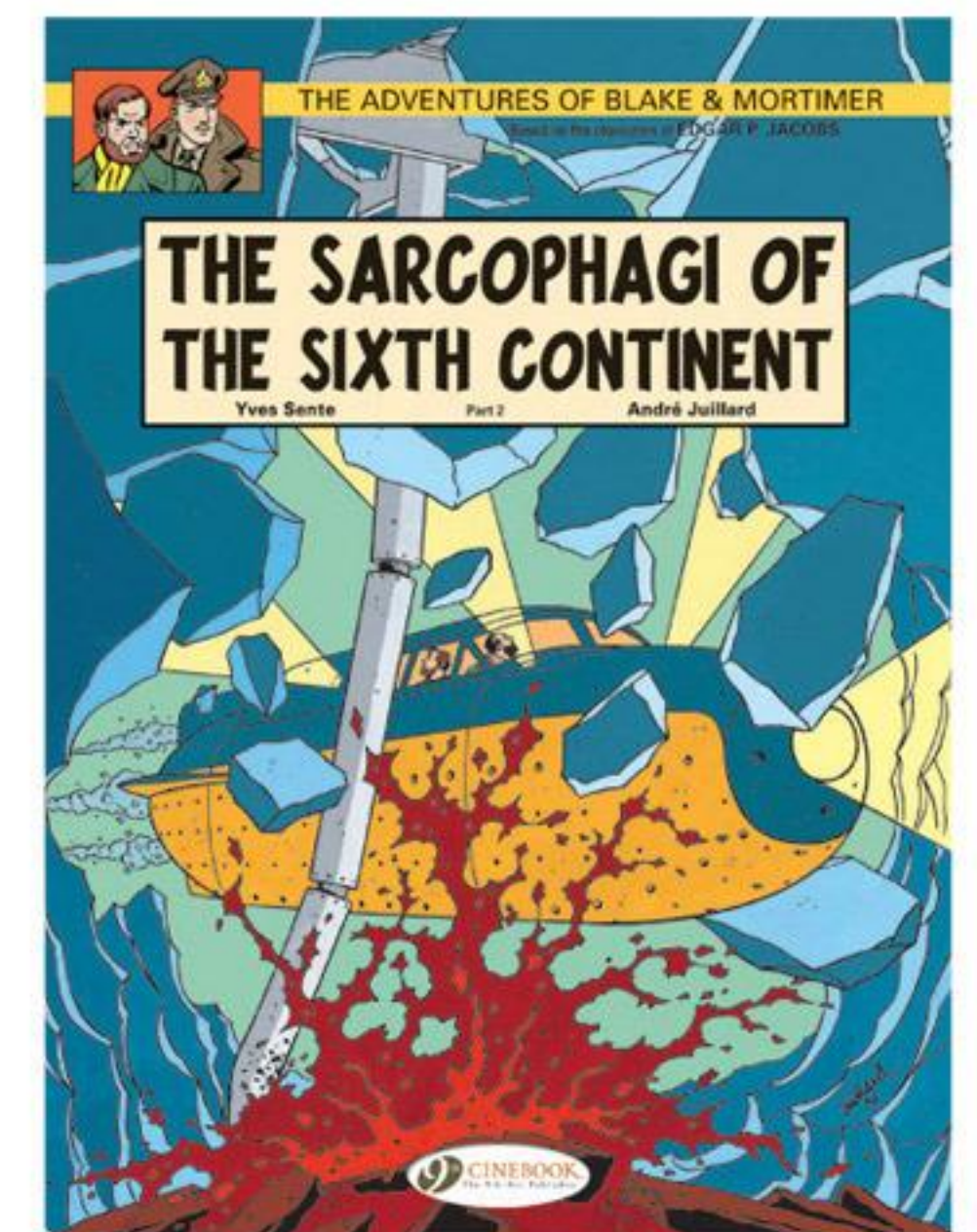
7-The Affair of the Necklace
EDGAR P. JACOBS



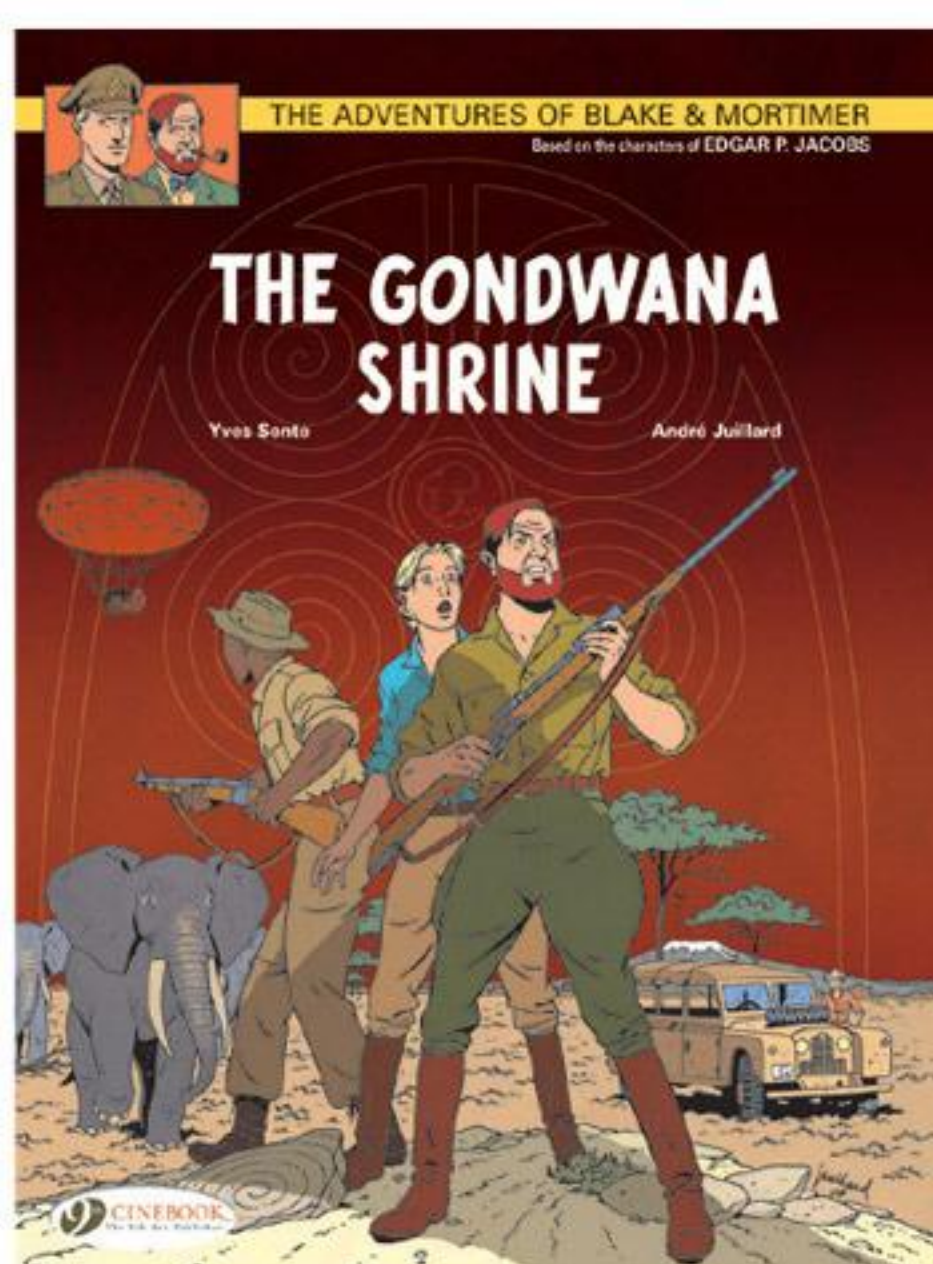
8-The Voronov Plot
SENTE - JUILLARD



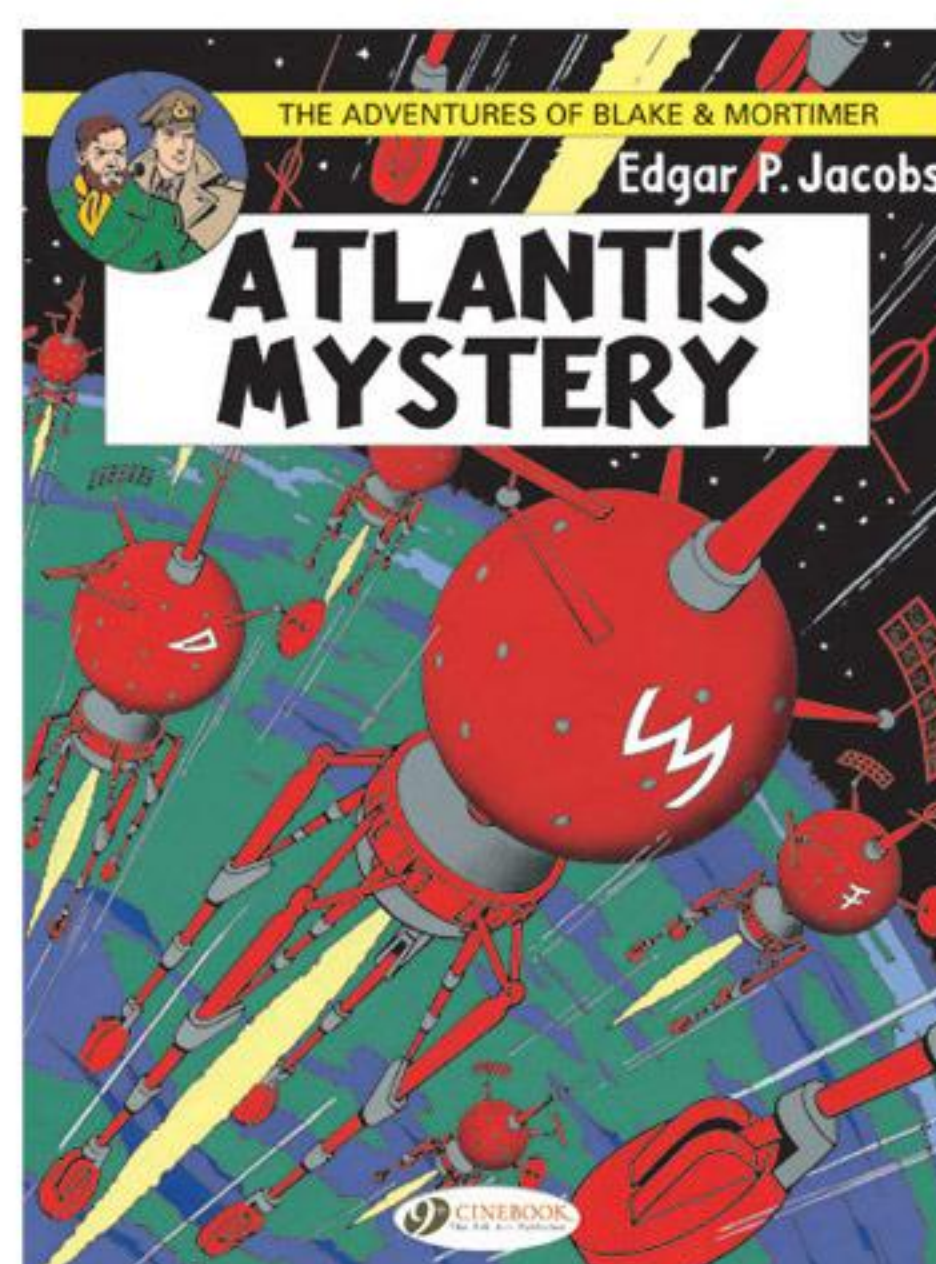
9-The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent Part 1
SENTE - JUILLARD



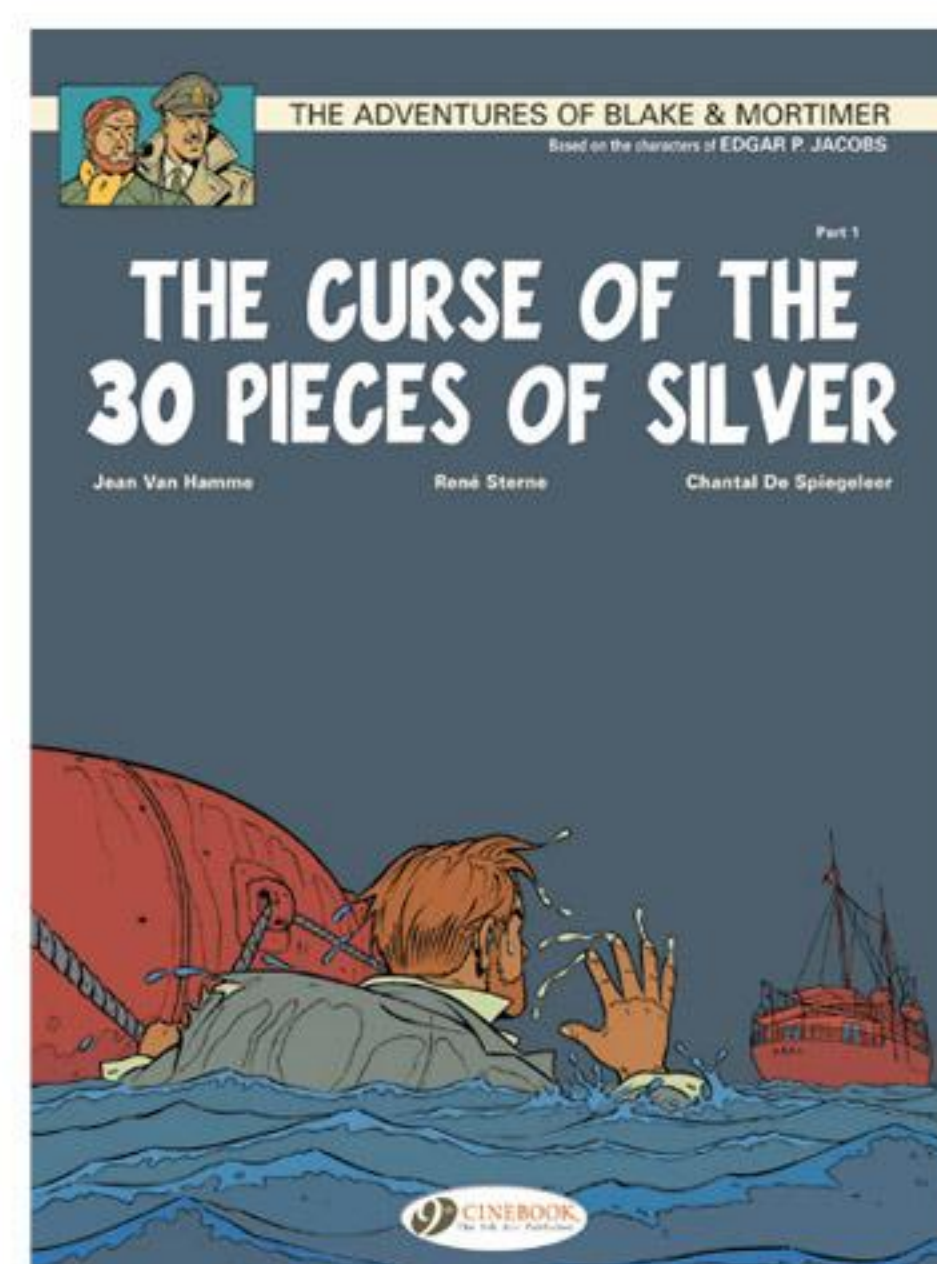
10-The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent Part 2
SENTE - JUILLARD



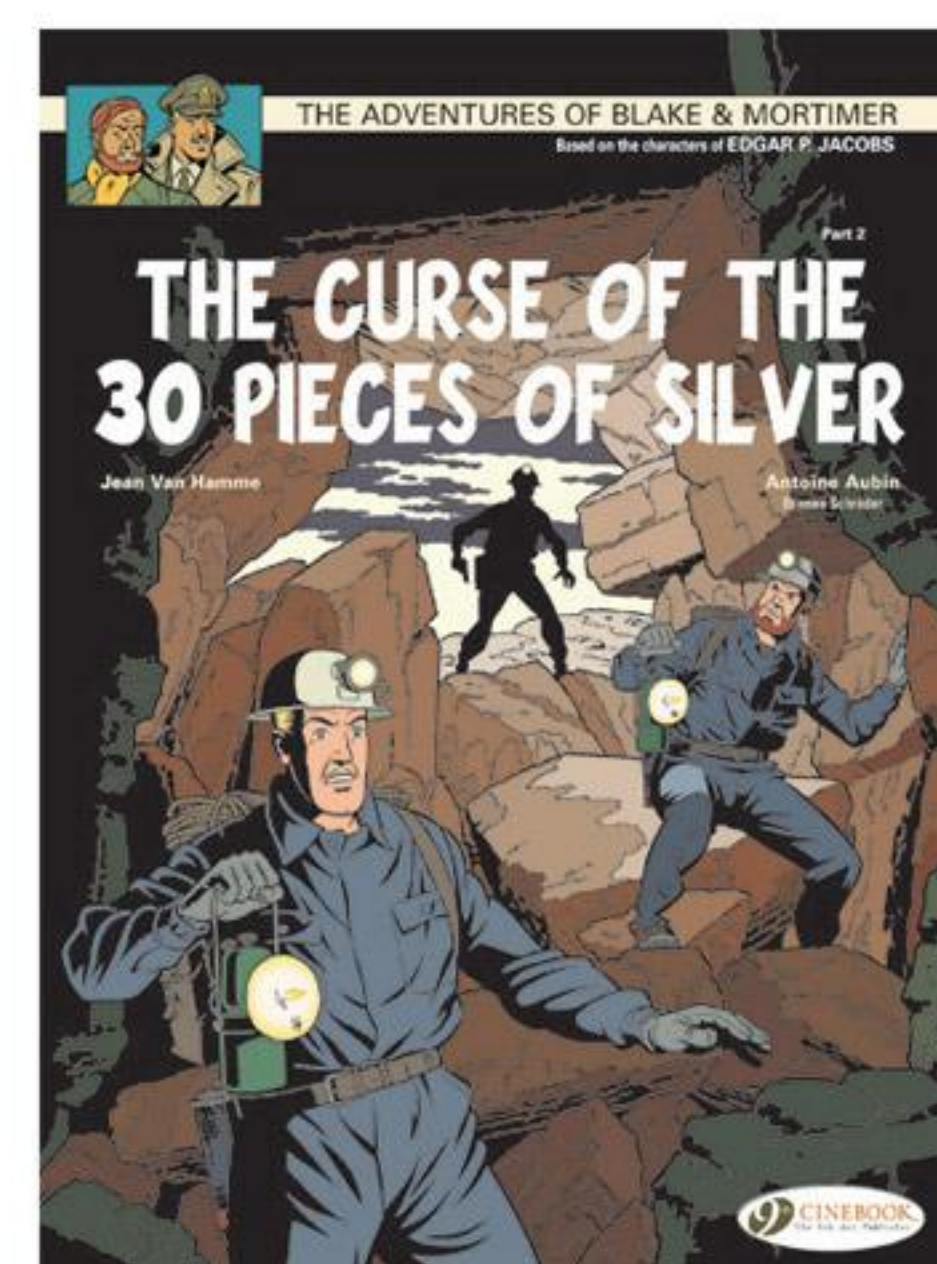
11-The Gondwana Shrine
SENTE - JUILLARD



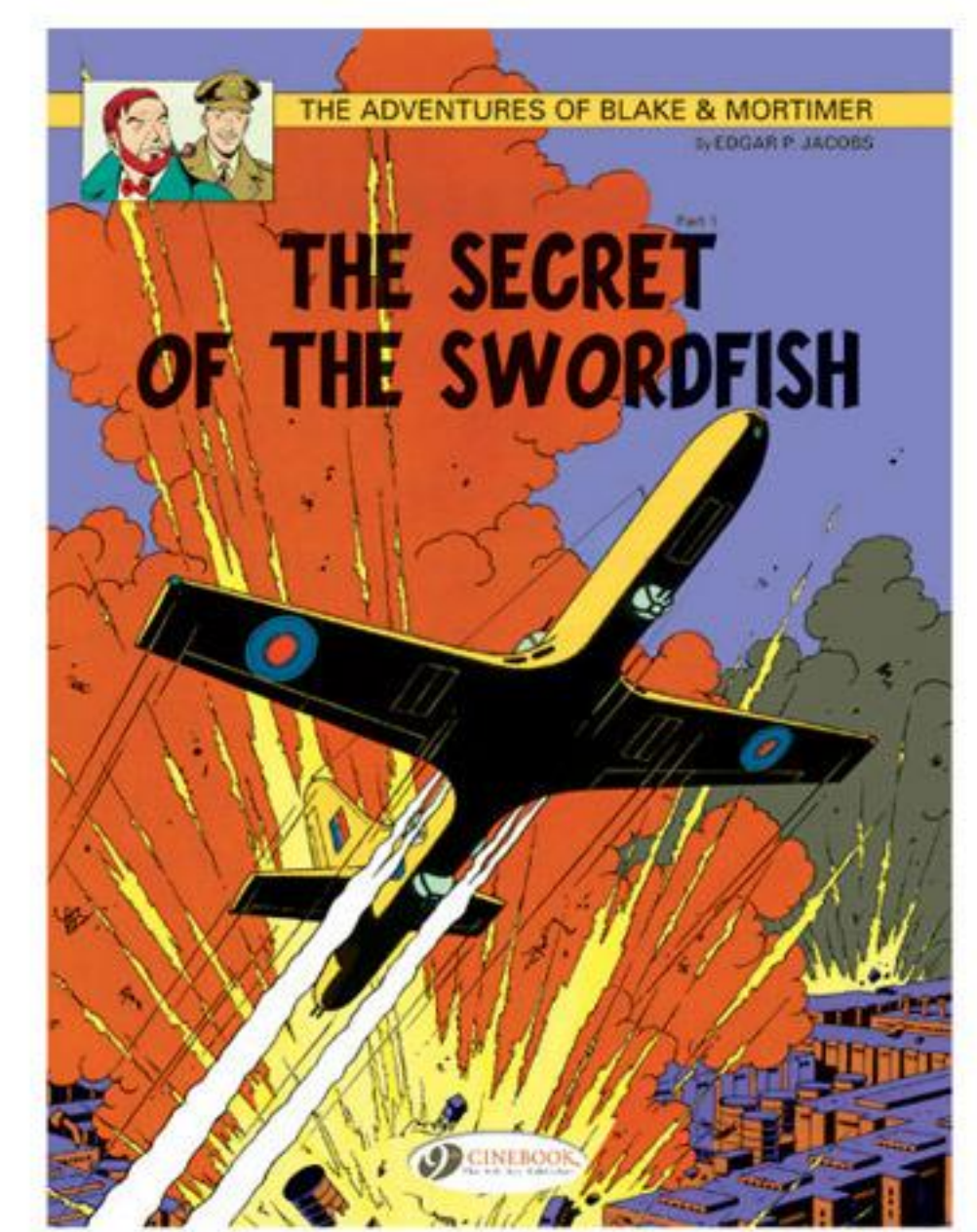
12-Atlantis Mystery
EDGAR P. JACOBS



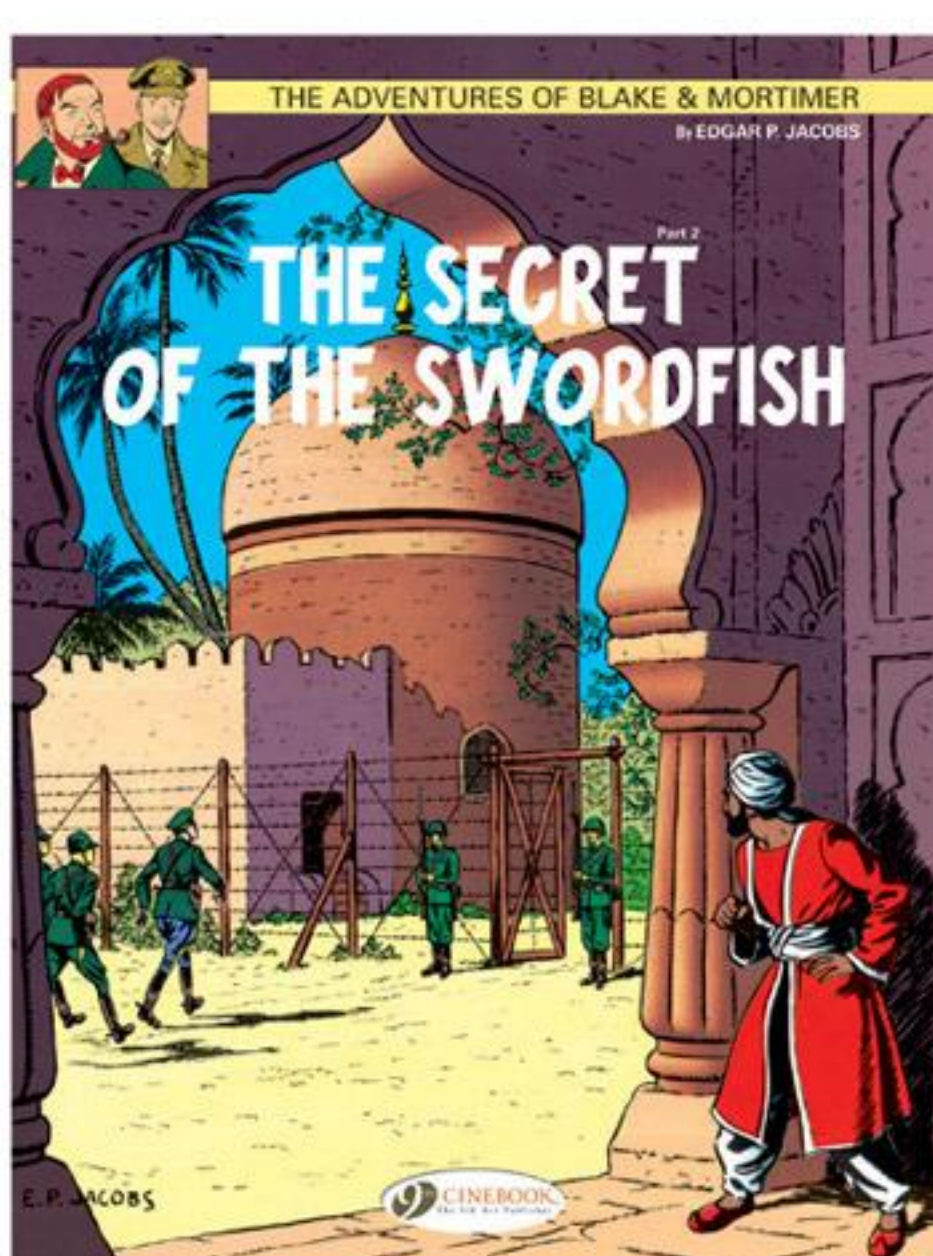
13-The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 1
VAN HAMME - STERNE - DE SPIEGELEER



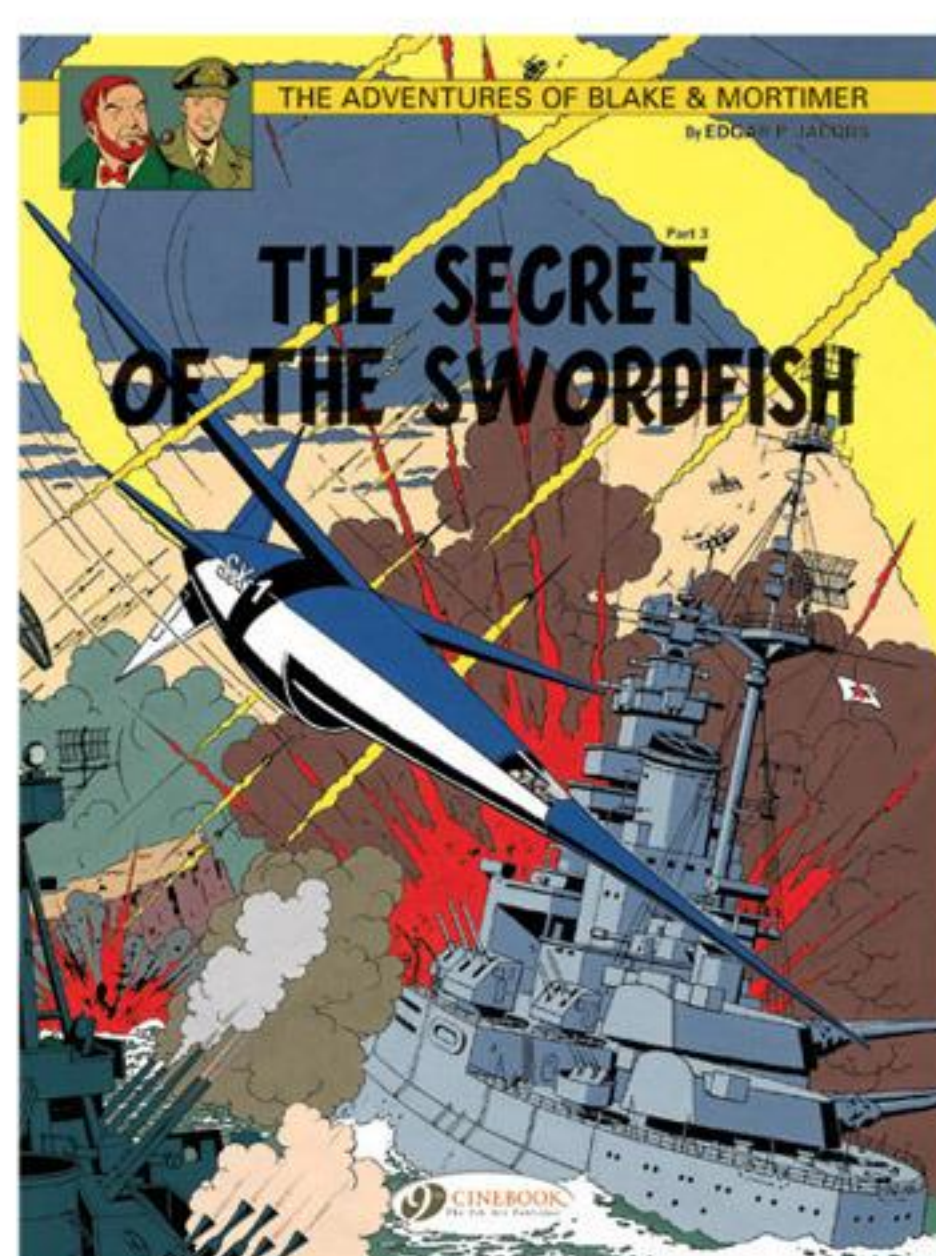
14-The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver Part 2
VAN HAMME - AUBIN - SCHREDER



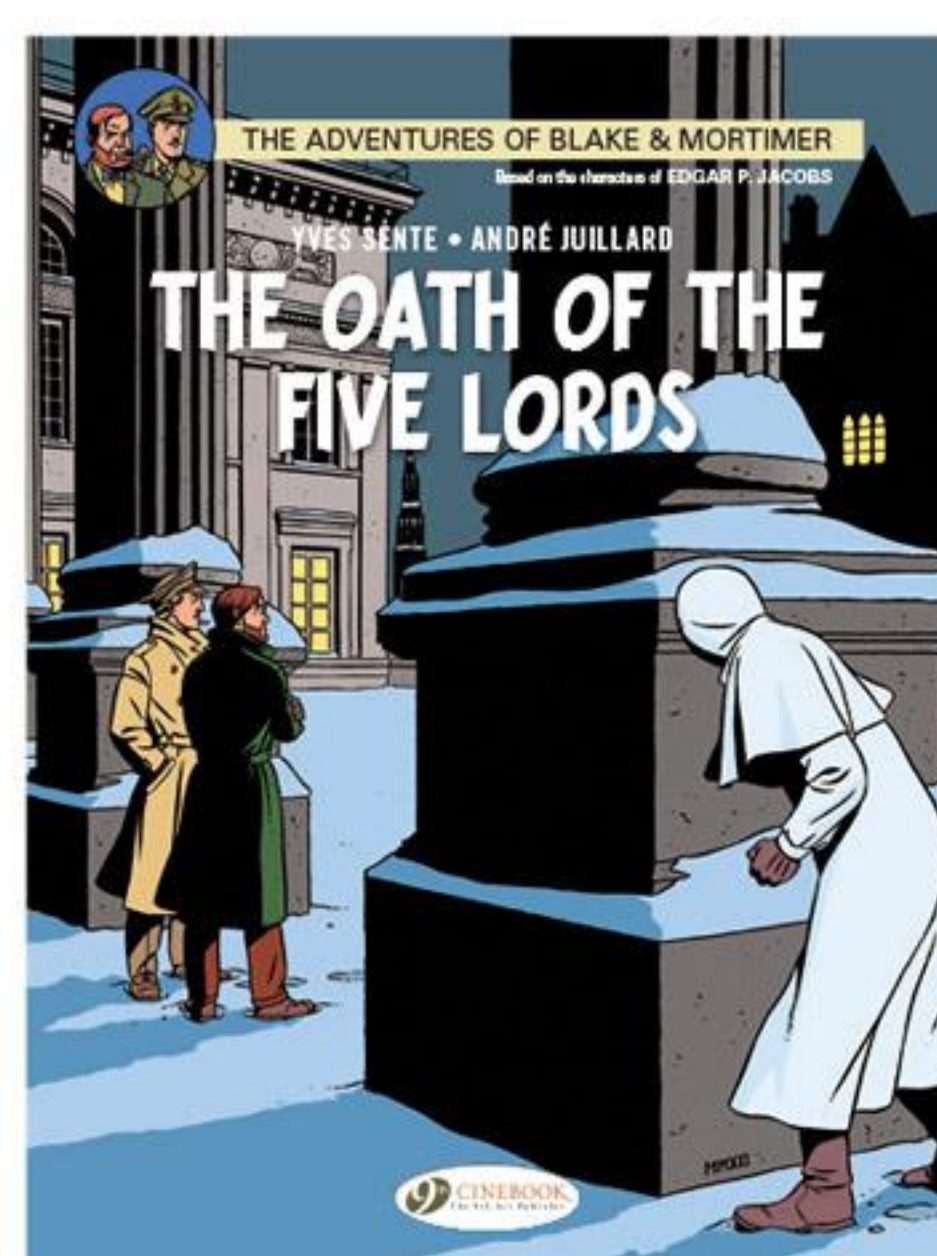
15-The Secret of the Swordfish Part 1
EDGAR P. JACOBS



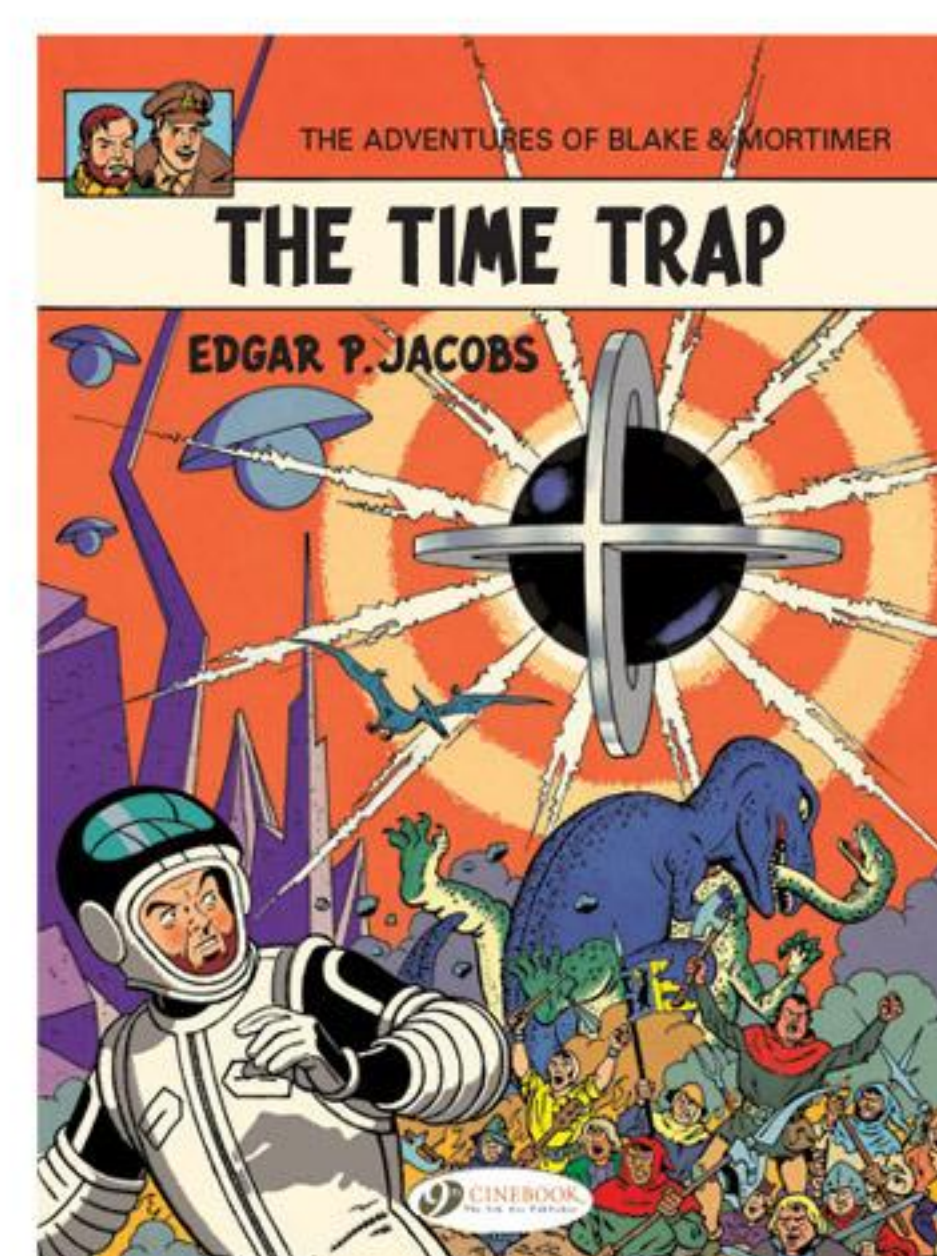
16-The Secret of the Swordfish Part 2
EDGAR P. JACOBS



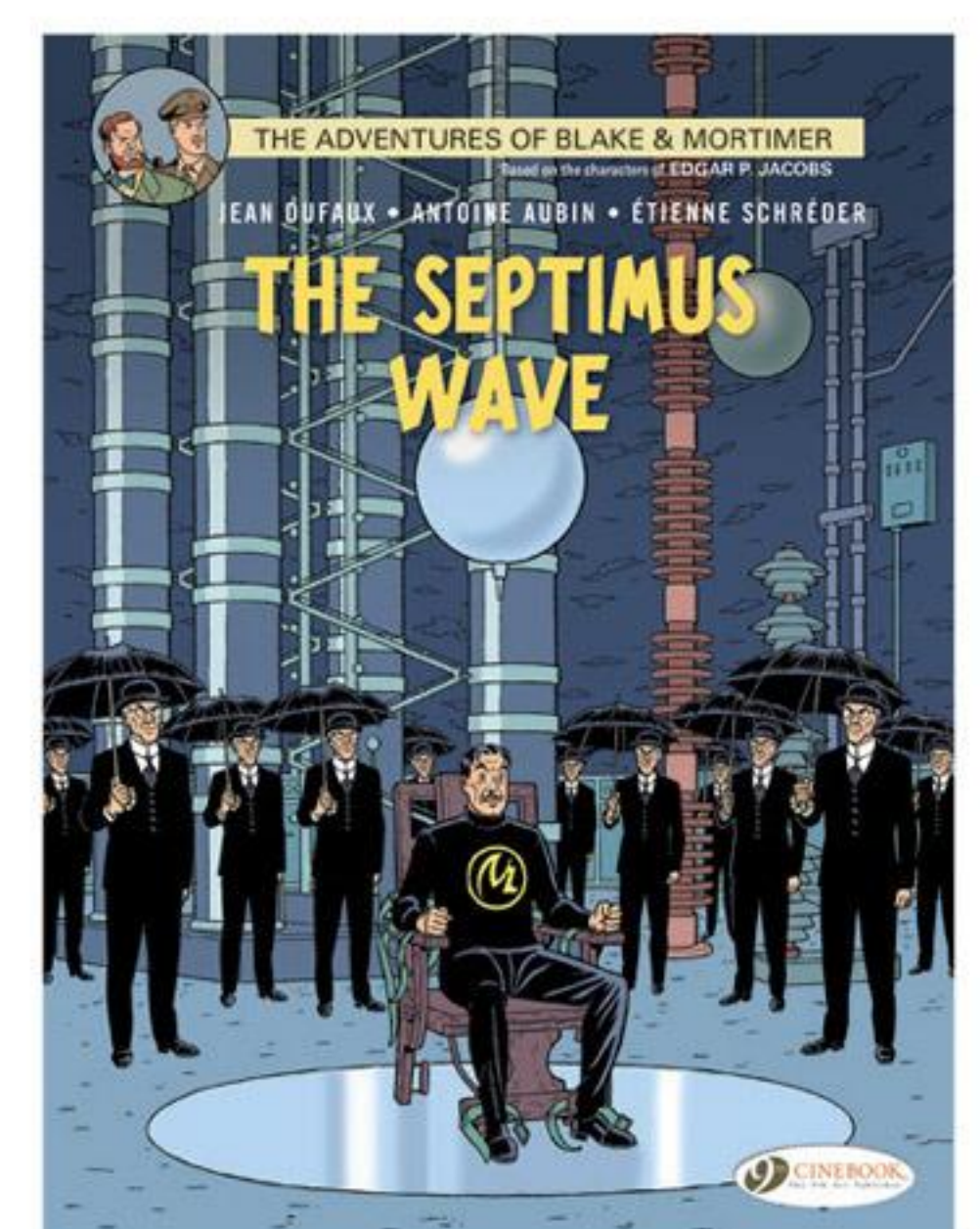
17-The Secret of the Swordfish Part 3
EDGAR P. JACOBS



18-The Oath of the Five Lords
SENTE - JUILLARD

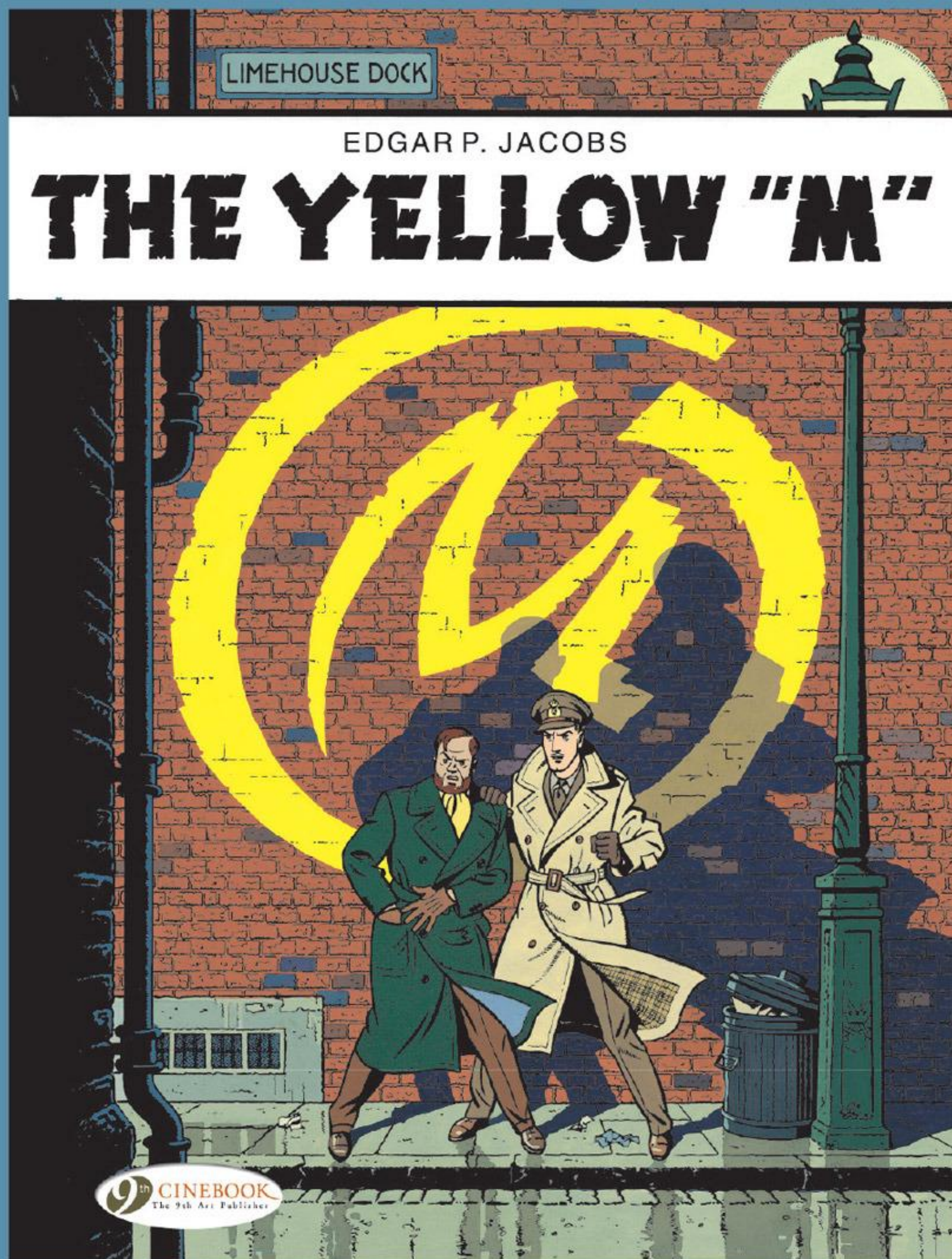


19-The Time Trap
EDGAR P. JACOBS



20-The Septimus Wave
DUFAUX - AUBIN - SCHREDER

EDGAR P. JACOBS



THE YELLOW "M"

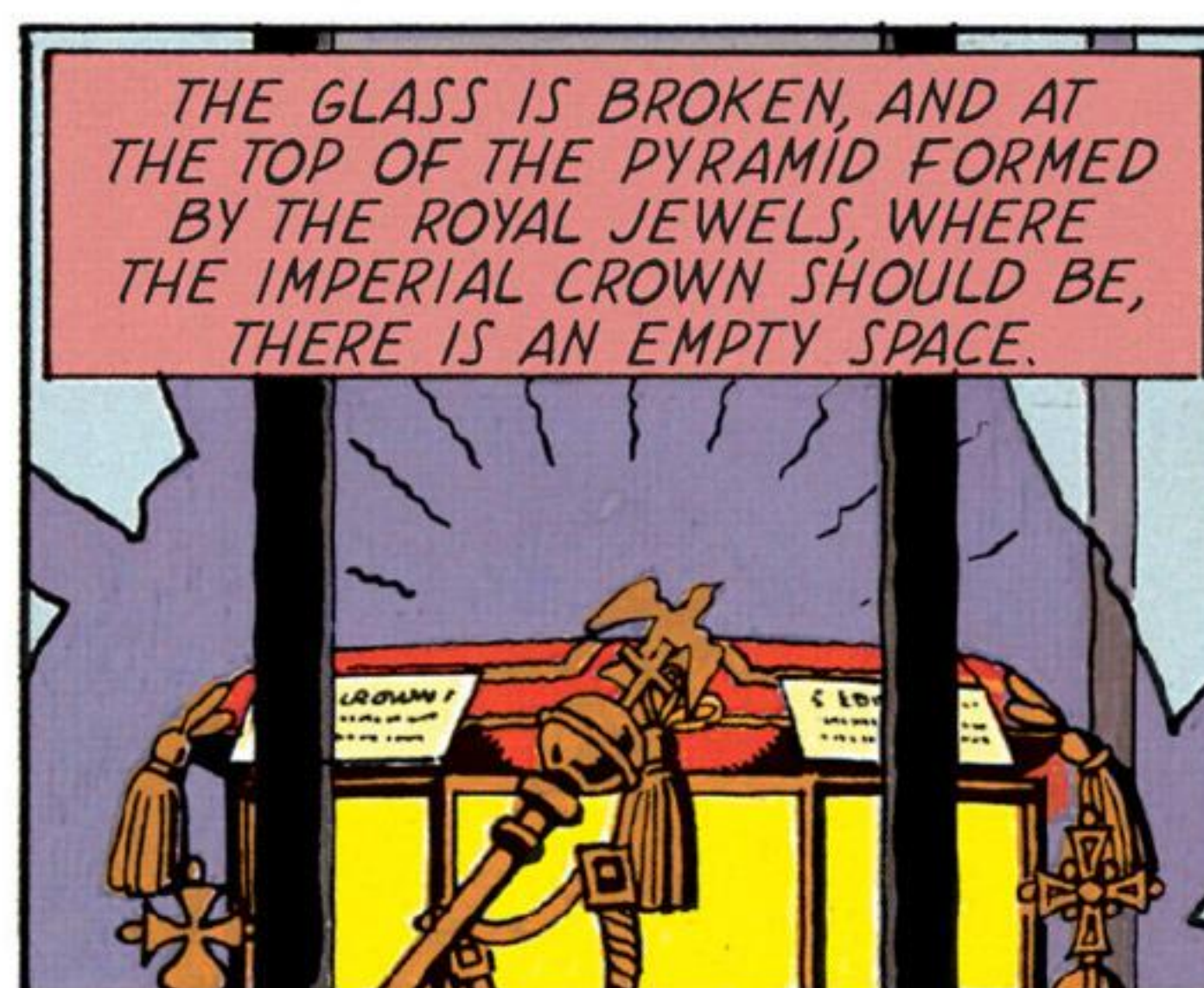
London's walls resound with the incredible exploits of the "Yellow Mark." The spectacular actions of this mysterious criminal are on the increase: holding up the Bank of England, robbing the imperial crown... No one seems able to stop him. He is so audacious that he lets the police know in advance where he will commit his crimes, each time ridiculing Scotland Yard a little more.

The apparent ease with which he evades police schemes begins to worry the highest authorities of the country.

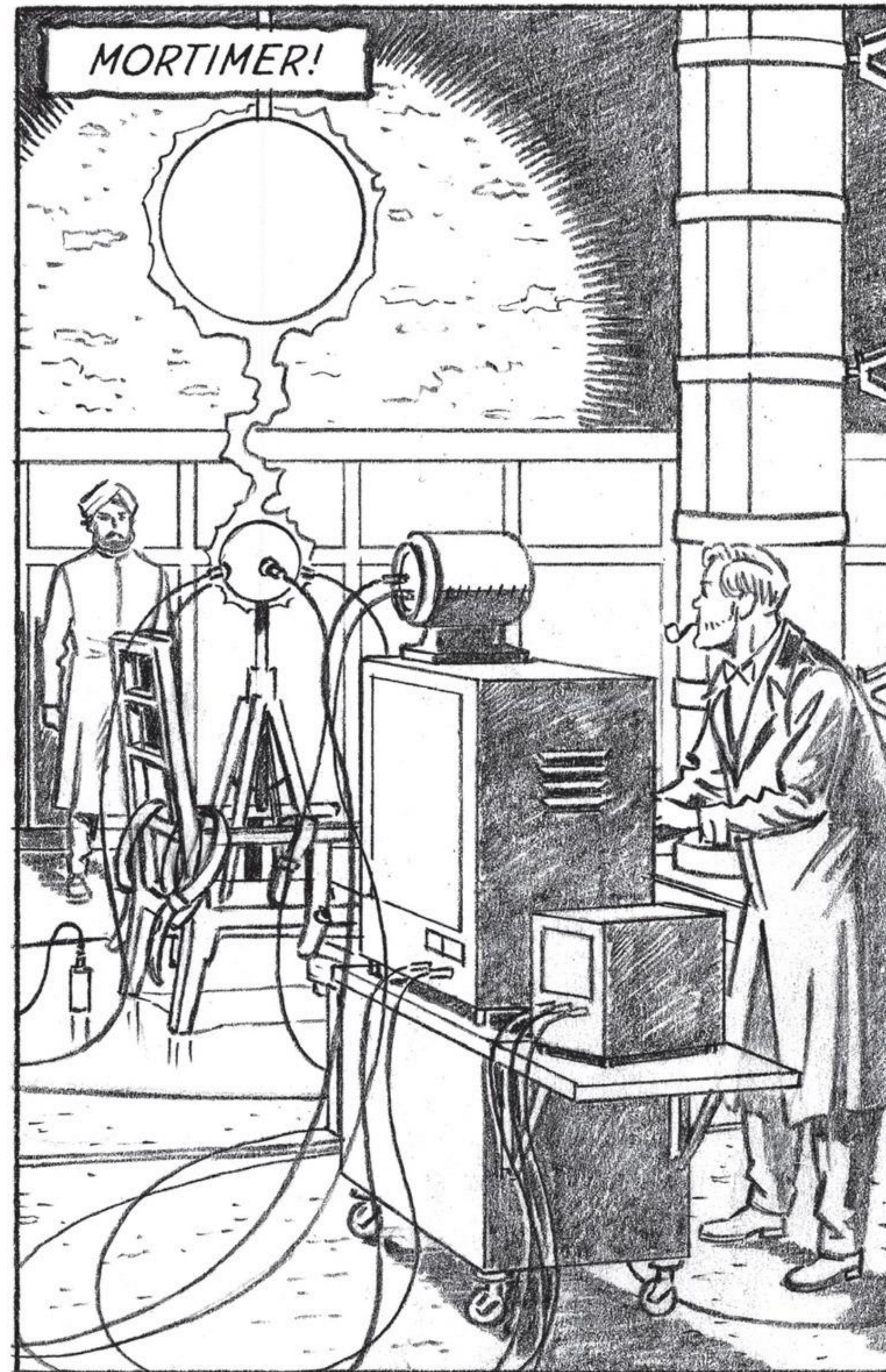
The Home Office asks Captain Francis Blake to solve the mystery and discover the identity of the man who hides behind the Yellow Mark. The captain immediately takes as partner his old friend, Professor Philip Mortimer, whose scientific knowledge will be invaluable in solving this extremely complex enigma. Who hides behind the Yellow Mark?



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IS THE MASTER OF THE YELLOW M BACK?



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THE SEPTIMUS WAVE

February 2015

TRANSLATED
FOR THE FIRST TIME INTO ENGLISH

PUBLISHED BY



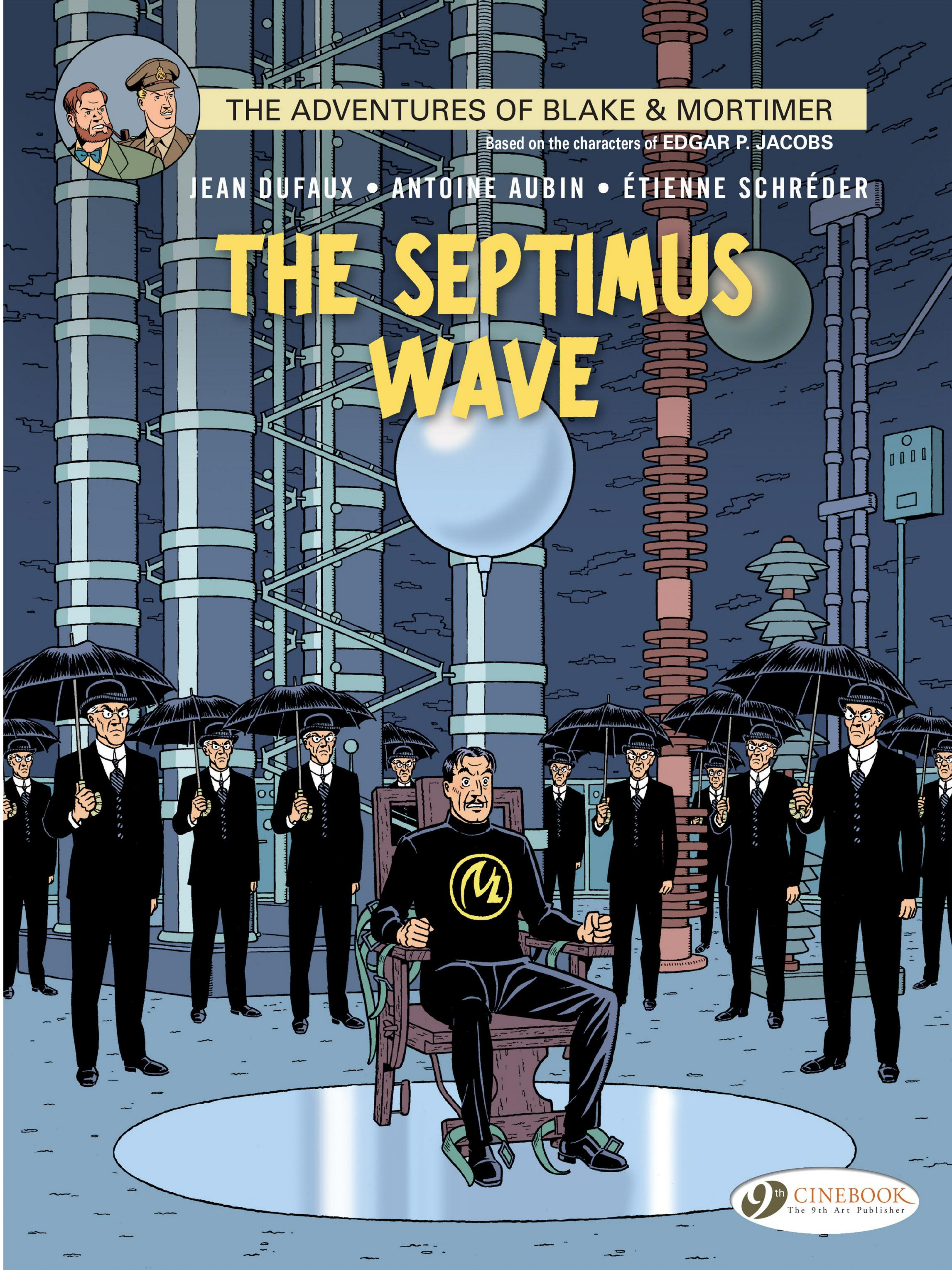


THE ADVENTURES OF BLAKE & MORTIMER

Based on the characters of EDGAR P. JACOBS

JEAN DUFAUX • ANTOINE AUBIN • ÉTIENNE SCHRÉDER

THE SEPTIMUS WAVE





AND AS THE BRITISH MONARCHY TRIUMPHS BEFORE ITS CHEERING SUBJECTS...



...AS THE MARCHING HORSES AND THE BEATING DRUMS SET THE PACE OF THE PARADE FOR A POWERFUL NATION CONFIDENT IN ITSELF AND ITS FUTURE...

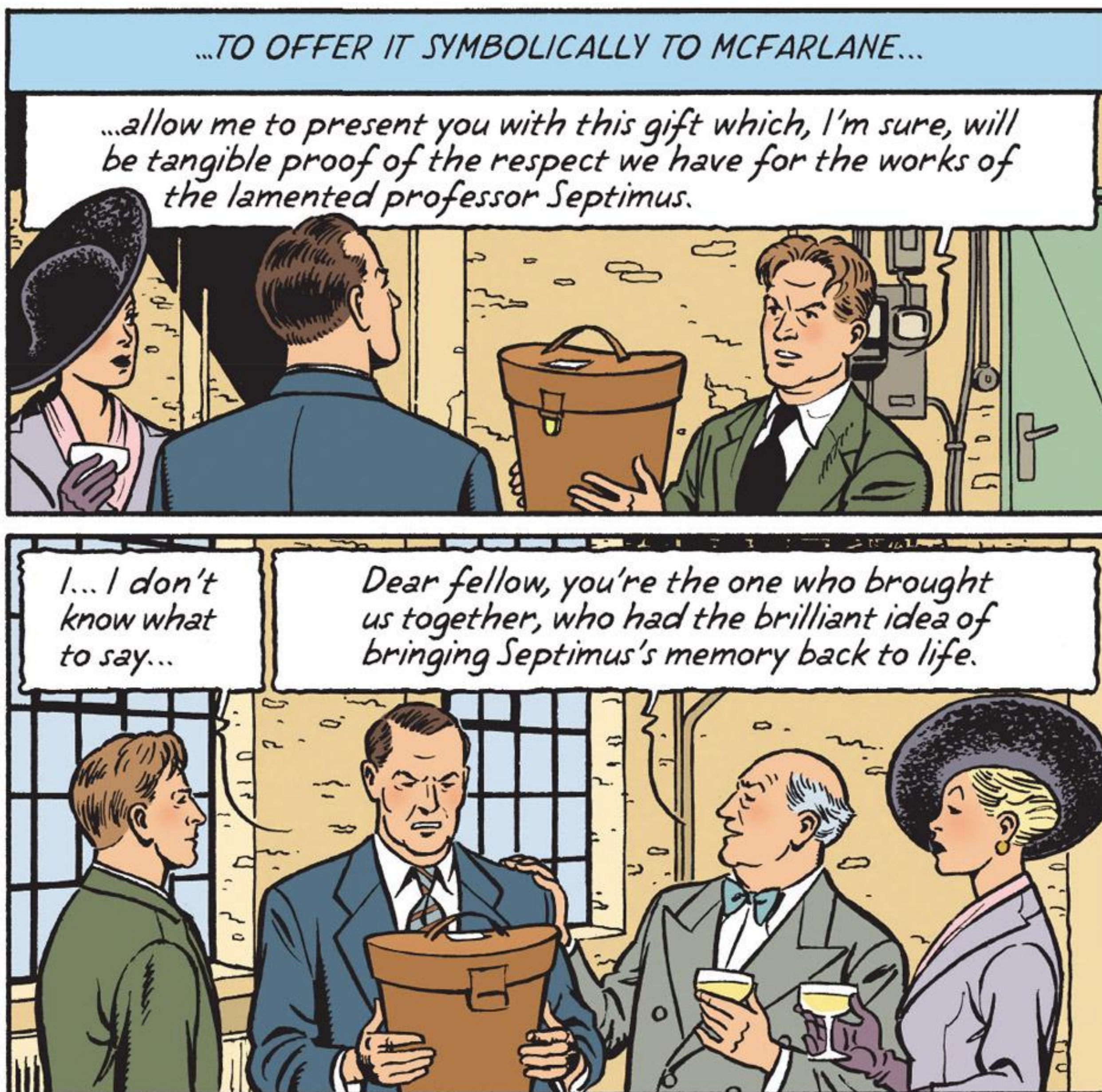


...AFTER YEARS OF WAR AND DESTRUCTION, AFTER THE YELLOW M'S WICKED CRIMES... AS EVERYONE ENJOYS THE RETURN OF SERENITY AT LAST...



...PROFESSOR EVANGELY PICKS UP THE HATBOX HE'S BROUGHT WITH HIM...

My dear Lieutenant...

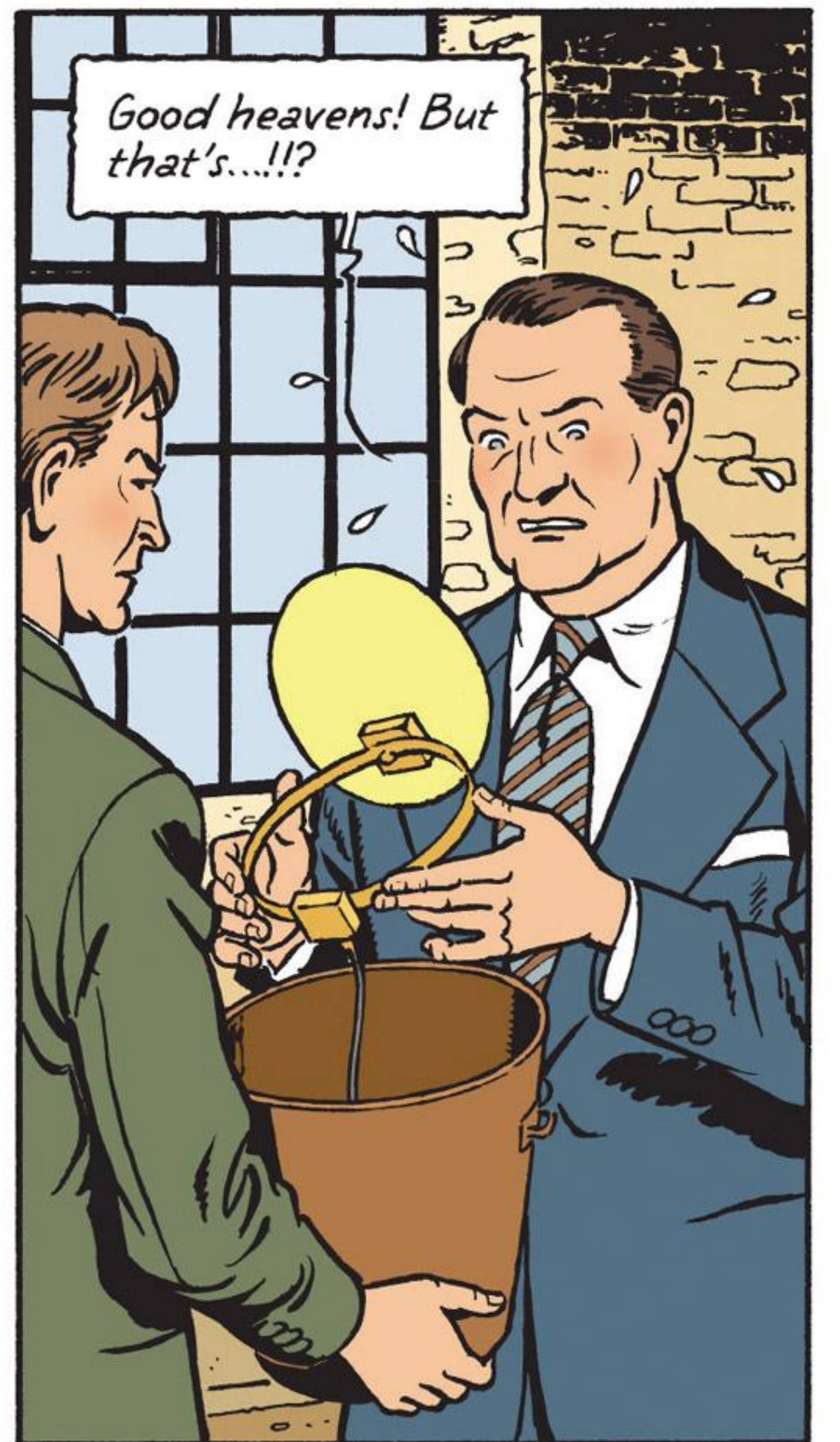


...TO OFFER IT SYMBOLICALLY TO MCFARLANE...

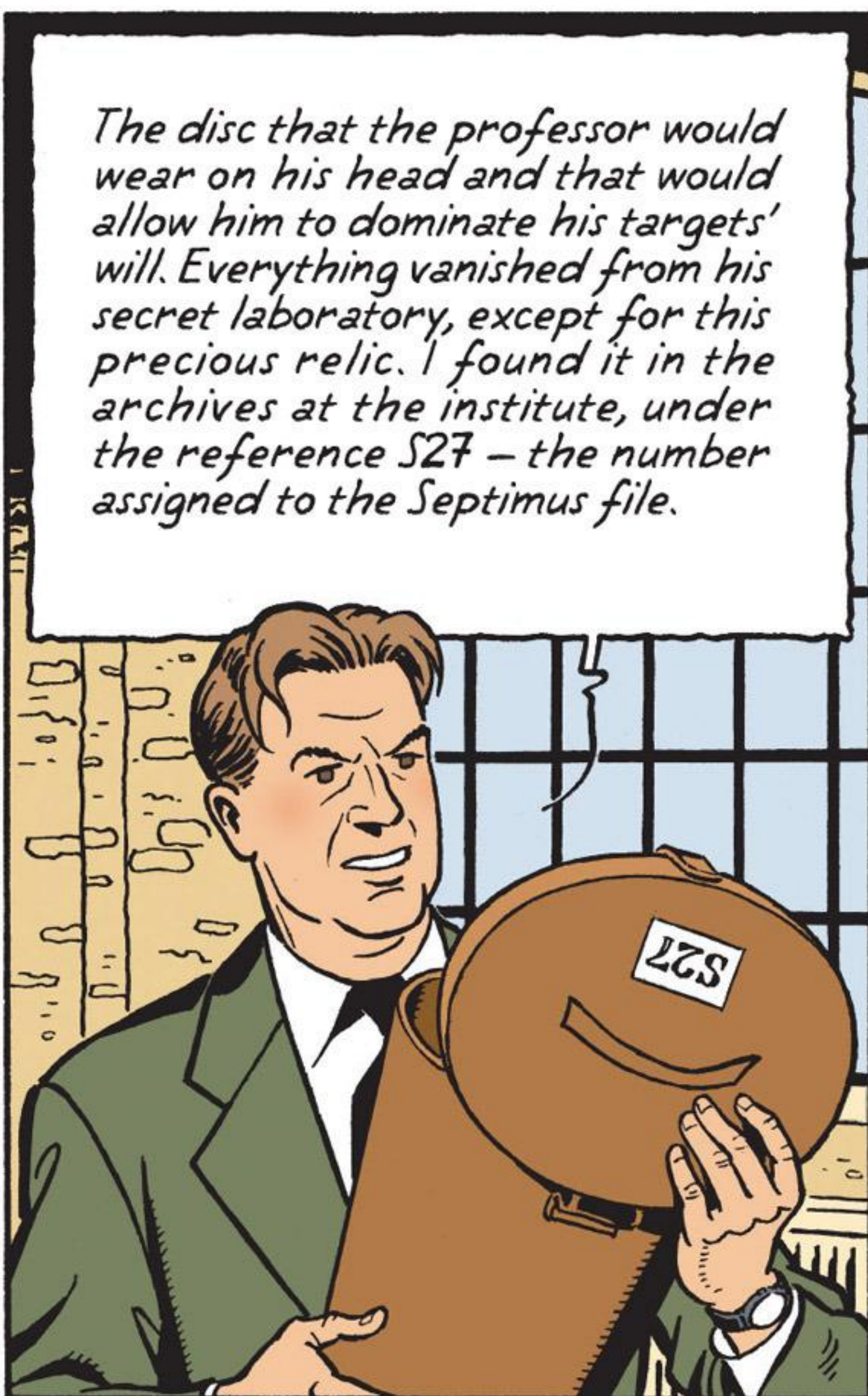
...allow me to present you with this gift which, I'm sure, will be tangible proof of the respect we have for the works of the lamented professor Septimus.

I... I don't know what to say...

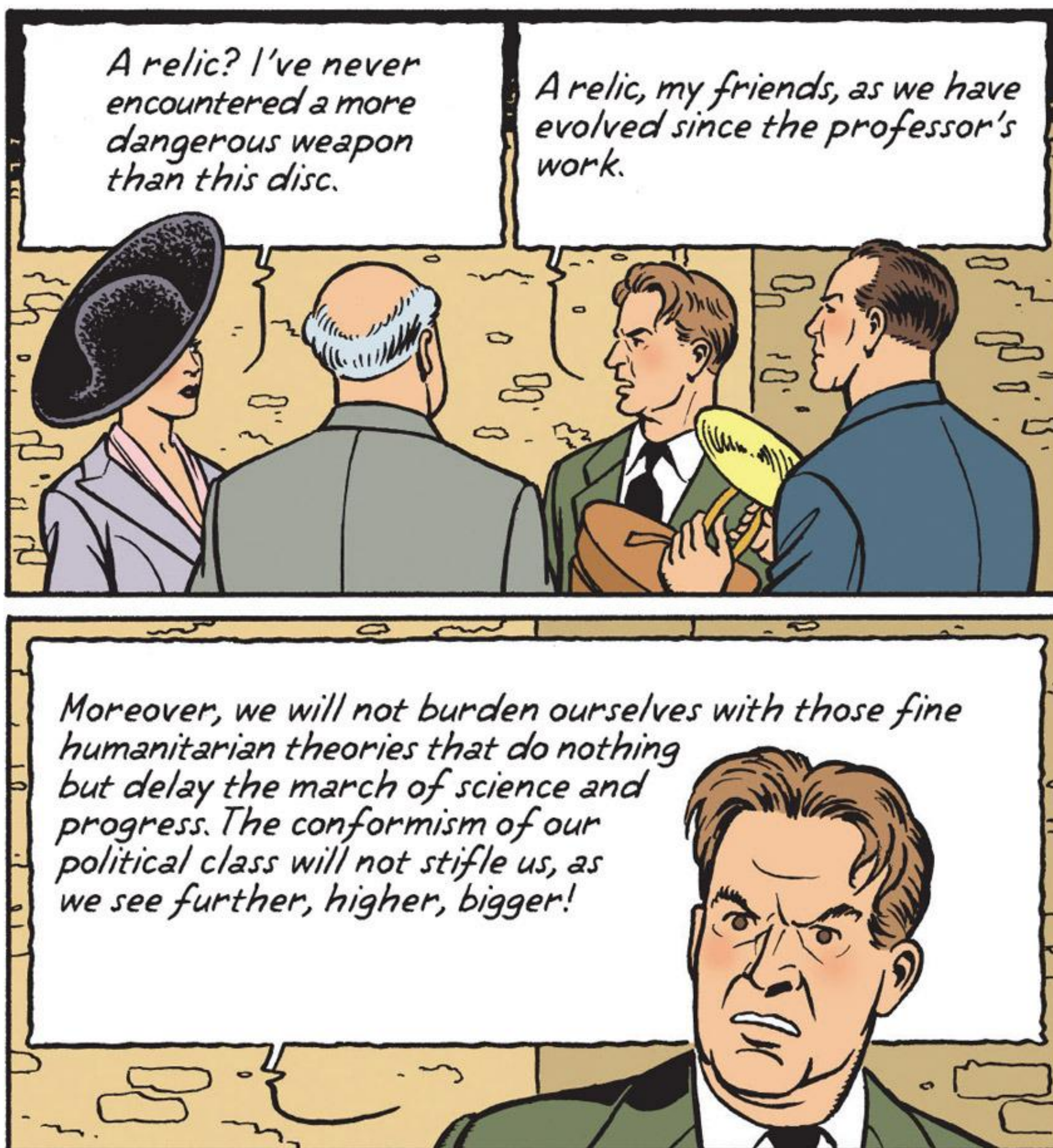
Dear fellow, you're the one who brought us together, who had the brilliant idea of bringing Septimus's memory back to life.



Good heavens! But that's...!!?



The disc that the professor would wear on his head and that would allow him to dominate his targets' will. Everything vanished from his secret laboratory, except for this precious relic. I found it in the archives at the institute, under the reference S27 - the number assigned to the Septimus file.



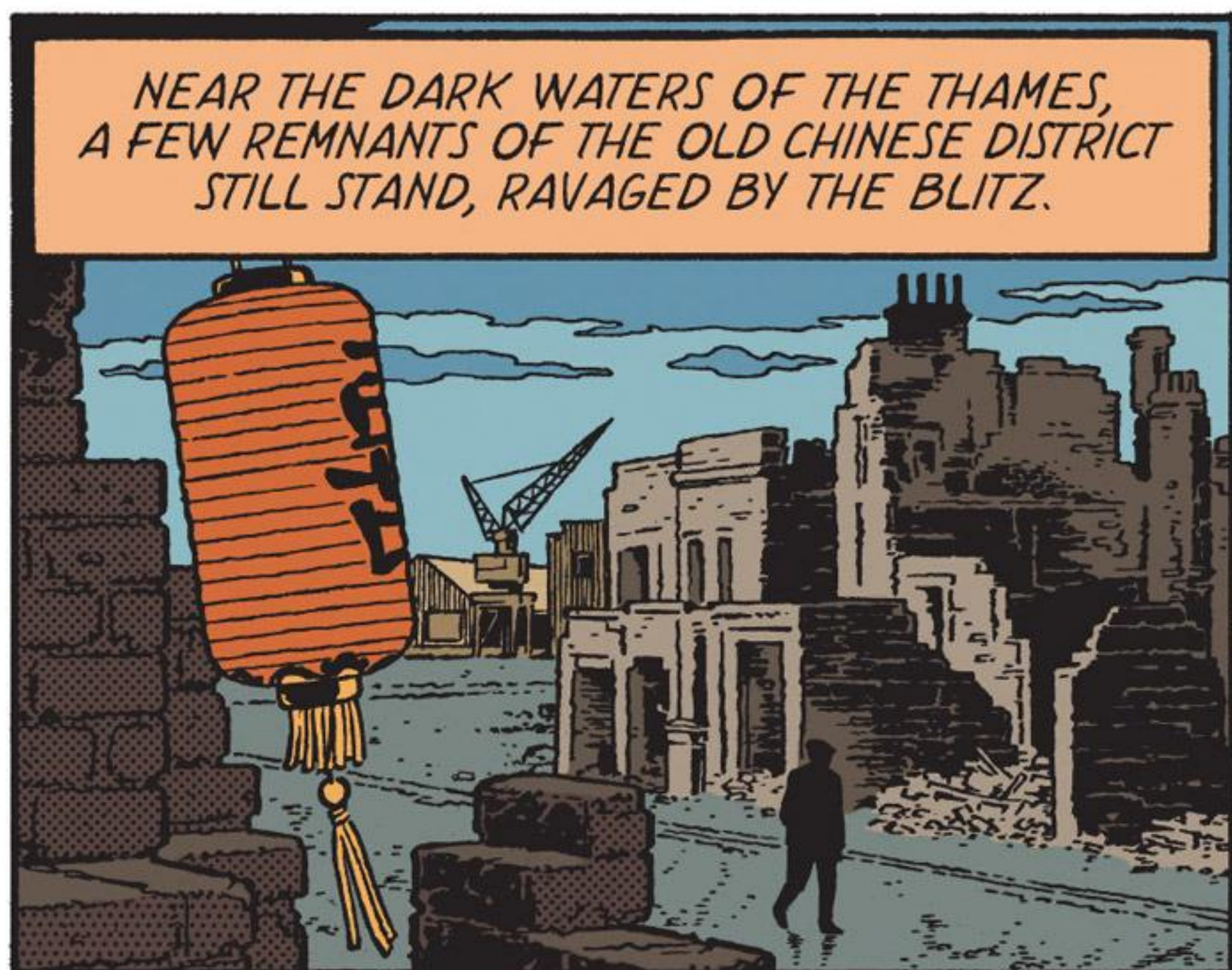
A relic? I've never encountered a more dangerous weapon than this disc.

A relic, my friends, as we have evolved since the professor's work.

Moreover, we will not burden ourselves with those fine humanitarian theories that do nothing but delay the march of science and progress. The conformism of our political class will not stifle us, as we see further, higher, bigger!



We still need to find a new guinea pig for that, my dear Evangely. Someone on whom you can test your research...



Edgard Félix Pierre Jacobs (1904–1987), better known under his pen name Edgar P. Jacobs, was a comic book creator (writer and artist), born in Brussels, Belgium. It has been said of Jacobs that he didn't remember a time when he hadn't drawn.

Jacobs assisted fellow Belgian Hergé (Georges Prosper Remi) in the recasting of Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo*, *Tintin in America*, *King Ottokar's Sceptre* and *The Blue Lotus* for book publication. He also contributed directly to both the drawing and storylines for the Tintin double-albums *The Secret of the Unicorn/Red Rackham's Treasure* and *The Seven Crystal Balls/Prisoners of the Sun*.

When the comics magazine Tintin was launched on 26th September 1946, it included Jacobs' story *Le secret de l'Espadon* (*The Secret of the Swordfish*). This story would be the first in the Blake and Mortimer series.

The characters of Captain Francis Blake, dashing head of MI5, his friend Professor Philip Mortimer, a nuclear physicist, and their sworn enemy Colonel Olrik became legendary heroes of the 9th art in the long-running series.

After Jacobs' death in 1987, Bob de Moor completed his unfinished last story. In the mid-1990s, the series was continued by the Jacobs Studios with new teams of writers and artists.



ORIGINAL FRENCH EDITION		
1	1950	Le secret de l'Espadon, T1
2	1953	Le secret de l'Espadon, T2
3	1953	Le secret de l'Espadon, T3
4	1954	Le mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T1
5	1955	Le mystère de la Grande Pyramide, T2
6	1956	La marque Jaune
7	1957	L'énigme de l'Atlantide
8	1959	S.O.S. Météores
9	1962	Le piège diabolique
10	1967	L'affaire du collier
11	1971	Les trois formules du professeur Satō, T1
12	1990	Les trois formules du professeur Satō, T2 (Jacobs/De Moor)
13	1996	L'affaire Francis Blake (Van Hamme/Benoit)
14	2000	La machination Voronov (Sente/Juillard)
15	2001	L'étrange rendez-vous (Van Hamme/Benoit)
16	2003	Les sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T1 (Sente/Juillard)
17	2004	Les sarcophages du Sixième Continent, T2 (Sente/Juillard)
18	2008	Le sanctuaire du Gondwana (Sente/Juillard)
19	2009	La malédiction des 30 deniers, T1 (Van Hamme/Sterne/De Spiegeleer)
20	2010	La malédiction des 30 deniers, T2 (Van Hamme/Aubin)
21	2012	Le serment des cinq Lords (Sente/Juillard)
22	2013	L'onde Septimus (Dufaux/Aubin/Schröder)

CINEBOOK EDITION		
15	2013	The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 1
16	2013	The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 2
17	2013	The Secret of the Swordfish, Part 3
2	2007	The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 1
3	2008	The Mystery of the Great Pyramid, Part 2
1	2007	The Yellow "M"
12	2012	Atlantis Mystery
6	2009	S.O.S. Meteors
19	2014	The Time Trap
7	2010	The Affair of the Necklace
		Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 1
		Professor Satō's Three Formulas, Part 2
4	2008	The Francis Blake Affair
8	2010	The Voronov Plot
5	2009	The Strange Encounter
9	2011	The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 1
10	2011	The Sarcophagi of the Sixth Continent, Part 2
11	2011	The Gondwana Shrine
13	2012	The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver, Part 1
14	2012	The Curse of the 30 Pieces of Silver, Part 2
18	2014	The Oath of the Five Lords
20	2015	The Septimus Wave

Original title: Le piège diabolique

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